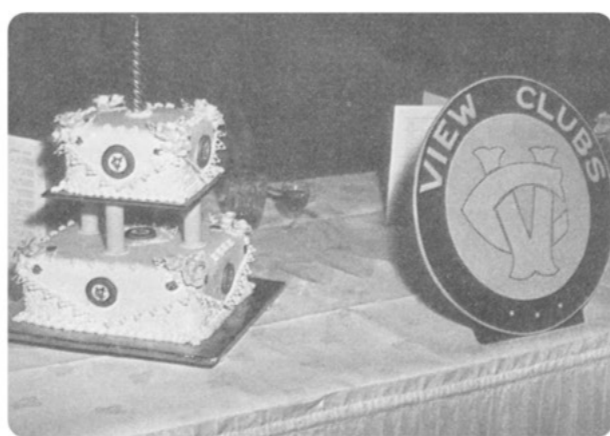


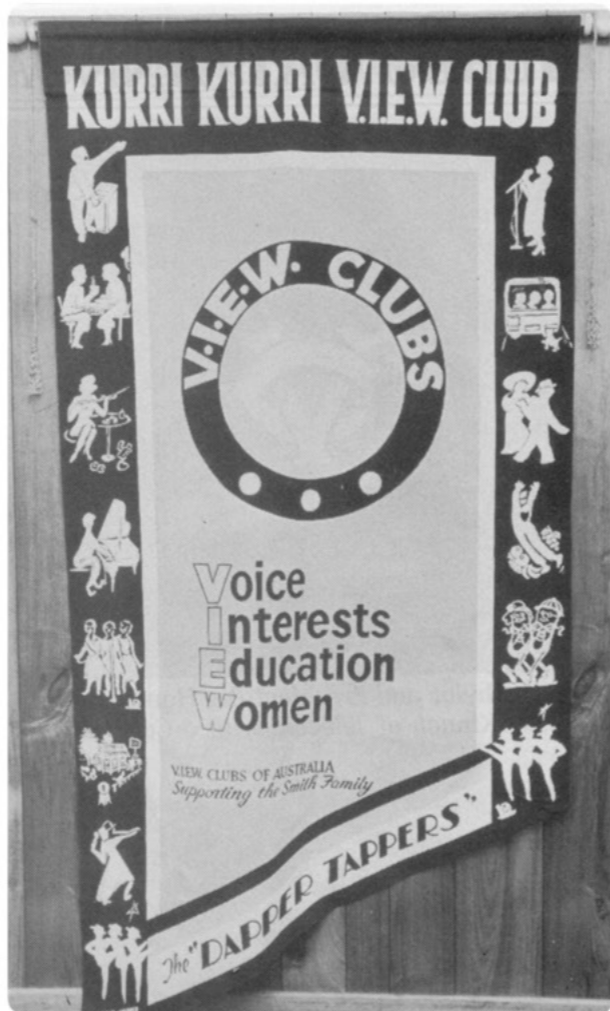
A Literary View



F O R E W O R D

The Short Story Competition, begun in 1964, created wide interest among all VIEW Clubs and the enthusiasm of the members was evident by the number of women who felt inspired to submit entries. First Prize 30 guineas and a trophy, Second prize 15 guineas. The well-known author Kylie Tennant was the judge. That first competition, was won by Peta Hughes of the Lane Cove VIEW Club, "Monica and the Mink".

While reading through the magazines I realised this is a part of the VIEW history unknown to many of today's members. The idea of creating a collection of these stories has led to "A Literary VIEW", a compendium of VIEW Short Stories showcasing the amazing writing skills and creativity of our members.



Over the next three decades the winning stories were published in the VIEW magazine. At times the magazine also published a range of other members' contributions. The authors chose familiar topics reflecting the world around them and the content of the stories cover a microcosm of the times.

Some writers were prolific, their names appearing frequently, while others wrote only one or two stories. Poetry also featured in many editions of the magazine.

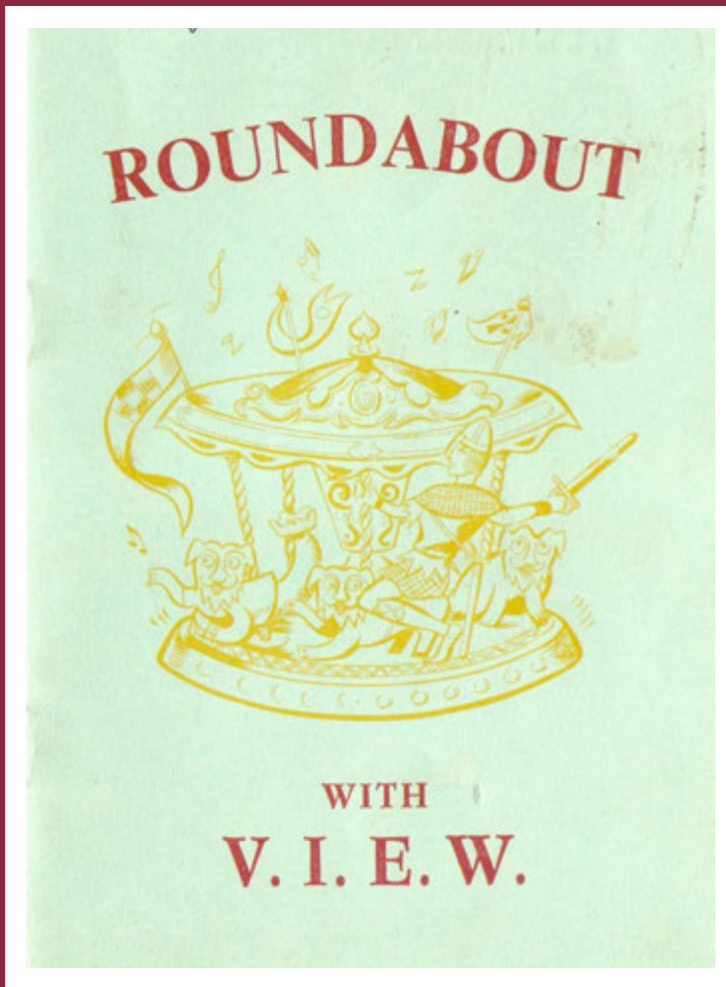
There are stories of love, adversity, hardship, inequality and most commonly friendship; friendship burgeoning through adversity. Many stories reflect the underlying values of these VIEW women and reflect the latent literary talent which merely needed an outlet to flourish.

The award continued until 1999 under a number of names. Begun as the State President's Literary Award it later became the Literary Award and in the late 1980's became known as The Editor's Award. In 1999 the Short Story Competition ceased.

This third volume continues the story of the remarkable literary talent of VIEW Club members.



Susan Groenhout
Past National Vice President
Chair VIEW History Working Group



ABOUT VIEW

Our Vision

Women creating and leading a more inclusive society

A valued part of The Smith Family

VIEW Clubs of Australia is a leading women's volunteer organisation and support network that empowers women to have their voices heard on issues of importance in Australian society. VIEW stands for Voice, Interests and Education of Women. Thousands of women across Australia belong to VIEW.

VIEW is the only national women's organisation solely focused on supporting and advocating for the education of young disadvantaged Australians. It is a non-religious, non-political organisation.

VIEW provides women with the opportunity to meet regularly with other women from all walks of life, establish lasting friends and help disadvantaged Australian children through supporting the work of children's charity, The Smith Family. Education and leadership opportunities are also part of the VIEW offering, in addition to the chance to be purposeful in supporting community need.

VIEW is a valued part of The Smith Family. Through social, community and fundraising activities VIEW members have supported the work of The Smith Family for more than 50 years.

More than 16,000 members across Australia, VIEW's reach and networks in local communities help to raise awareness and strengthen the impact of the work of The Smith Family.

VIEW is proud to be The Smith Family's single largest community sponsor of Learning for Life Students. Nationally, VIEW members sponsor more than 1, 100 disadvantaged students, enabling them to get the most from their education through assistance and support from The Smith Family's Learning for Life program.

We do this because we believe that by helping disadvantaged children succeed at school, we can have a lasting impact on their lives and potential generations to come.

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ABOUT VIEW MAGAZINE

Since the publication of the first V.I.E.W. newsletter in September 1960, the magazine has undergone many changes in style, content and title. Originally called VIEW Points it was typed and copied in The Smith Family office.

In September 1961 ROUNDAABOUT WITH V.I.E.W. was produced. A smaller book-like publication, "to give opportunity for clubs to publicise interesting activities and events and to keep members up to date and informed about VIEW Club ideas and programmes."

VIEWPOINT, appeared in about August 1962 with members asked to pay 1/- (10c.) per copy.

In July 1963 V.I.E.W. WORLD was published and continued in the same format for two years. Then in 1965 the magazine became more compact but with more content and was produced quarterly, with colour introduced VIEWWORLD remained as the magazine for twenty-eight years continuing as a forum for the women to voice their opinions on many issues and to develop their literary skills

In September 1991 the Spring Edition became Women's View. It was larger in size and contained 40 pages.

The name of the magazine again changed slightly in the Spring Edition of 1992 to WOMEN'S VIEW and in the Summer Edition 1997 to WOMEN'S VIEW.

In 2000 the magazine again changed name to VIEW which remained until 2010, the 50th Anniversary of VIEW Clubs, when it became VIEW MATTERS and remains so today.

ALL THINGS NEW

Once upon a time, in the not too distant past, there lived two people named Dan and Maisie. Although thoroughly different in nature and temperament, they had been happily married for almost 40 years.

As in all marriages, their life had had its stormy patches but they had weathered these with the philosophy that neither was without fault and by giving a little and taking a little, they usually managed to straighten out their differences.

Maisie, although in her late 50s, was still a very striking woman with a flawless complexion, big brown eyes and a figure envied by much younger women. Her dark hair was just beginning to show the tell-tale silver of advancing years.

She was intelligent, forthright and loving and considered education was everybody's birthright, her family of two sons and a daughter having been raised accordingly.

The only child of hard-working parents, Maisie had been one of the lucky ones. Due to parental sacrifices made on her behalf, her early life had been comparatively easy and she had had the benefit of a good education.

Bright, with an inquiring mind, she had loved school from the first day and had breezed through high school and tertiary education. Although devoted to study, she still found plenty of time for sport and the lighter side of learning.

Dan, tall and athletic, had been less fortunate. One of a large family, and the eldest son, he'd left school early to add his earnings to help feed the family. It had grieved his hard-hit parents that this had been necessary as they recognised their son's ability.

He thought he'd won the lottery

when he met Maisie at a local dance. It had been a whirlwind romance — one which he was sure her people weren't too keen about. But as he had felt slightly inadequate, he could appreciate them hoping for something better for their lovely daughter.

Once married, Maisie soon recognised the dormant potential in Dan and encouraged him in every way in self-education. He became an avid reader and took Tech courses, soaking up knowledge like a dry sponge. There seemed to be nothing he couldn't turn his hand to and do successfully. Maisie came to feel that she had been the luckier one in the partnership.

Now fast approaching retirement, they considered themselves two of the worlds most fortunate, with a family and grandchildren who, apart from illness, had never given them a moment's worry or trouble. They had a comfortable home, a little money behind them and they were secure in their love for each other.

One bright, sunny day while Maisie was hosing the garden the postman stopped at their box.

"Lovely day, Mrs Jackson. Letter for you. South Australian postmark. Nice and bulky too. Must be lots of news."

"Oh, that'll be from Jan, my daughter.

She's been there quite a few years now — her husband was transferred. She writes every week but I still miss her and the children. They're growing up too — elder one's at high school.

"Better let you go, I s'pose. That bag looks very full. Be careful on that motorbike.

Death-traps they are. Well, see you later."

Nice young fellow, she mused as she watched him shoot along the footpath and stop two doors up. One thing about him, he's never too busy for a pleasant word with an old biddy like me. More than I can say for some of those public servants!

She turned off the hose and settled on the front step in the sun to open her letter. She read it through three times and by then couldn't settle to do anything. By the time Dan arrived home she was bubbling with excitement.

"Dan," she exclaimed, "Jan wants us to visit them. Oh won't it be wonderful. I can hardly wait: it's been so long. I'll ask Mrs Foster to water the garden occasionally and I know she won't mind collecting the mail. I'll have to stop the milk and the paper. We can go by train. It's a bit far for you to drive and you don't enjoy long distances

and.....

"Steady on now," Dan managed to interrupt, "why don't you sit down and read the letter to me. That way I'll get to know the news and at the same time I'll learn what this is all about."

Although she'd have much rather given him a brief account, she settled down and read Jan's letter. Jan and John were celebrating a wedding anniversary and thought it would be a good opportunity for a family get-together. Besides, Jan liked the children to keep in touch with their grandparents. Pete in particular wanted Pop to see him play in the School XI, while Louise was waiting for Jan to see her at ballet class.

"Say we can go, please Dan. You can take a few weeks long service leave. I'm sure you'd be able."

"We'll see," Dan replied and Maisie smiled with relief. She knew that when Dan said those two words the matter was as good as settled.

Ten days later saw them, bags and luggage, entrained for Adelaide. She didn't think they'd ever arrive, it seemed so long. She wished they'd flown but that would have been too expensive. She'd just have to be patient and sit back and enjoy the scenery. After all, almost 12 hours was night travelling and she'd be asleep.

Complacent as always, Dan settled back with his pipe and book and let the wire fences, trees and poles slip past, kilometre by kilometre, while Maisie, her mind in a turmoil of what she'd do and say when she saw them all, was in a constant state of frustration at the slowness of the railways in general.

When they saw Adelaide on the horizon, Maisie was sure it must have been the slowest trip on record, deserving a mention in Guinness. But when she stepped from the train and saw the four of them standing there, all was forgotten.

"Jan, oh now glad....and John, you look so well. Pete, my you've grown and here's my little girl growing into a young lady. Oh, what a trip! I thought we'd never get here. How are you all?" Never waiting for an answer, the questions just rippled over her tongue like water in a babbling brook.

Dan beamed at them. "She'll run out in a few minutes," he said knowingly, "then we'll all be able to get in a few words." Picking up the luggage, he and John walked to the waiting car while Maisie followed, arms entwined with Jan and the children.

The weekend sped on golden wings while she caught up with the latest news. John had another promotion and was doing very well. They had to do quite a bit of entertaining now but they both enjoyed it.

Pete had a thousand and one things to tell them. He played in the School XI in summer and the soccer team in winter. He'd represented his school in competitive athletics as well as in the debating team; had six badges for his scout group and attended the "Y" on Saturday mornings. Maisie glowed with pride and pleasure at his achievements.

Being only eight, Louise's list was not quite so impressive but Maisie shared her love equally with her brood and had no favourites. Louise was having tennis lessons, learning ballet and had started music lessons. The latter pleased Maisie no end as both she and Jan were musical and Dan had a lovely baritone voice and did quite a creditable turn with a mouthorgan.

Day followed day of leisurely shopping with Jan, sightseeing, walking with the children or just lounging beside the pool with Dan, he with his inevitable pipe and book. He never seemed to tire of reading and Maisie often wondered if there was some psychological reason connected with his education being cut short at

a time when most young people have their noses in books and their heads in the clouds.

One afternoon after a particularly warm day, she was helping Jan prepare the evening meal when Pete came in from school.

"Had a good day son?" Jan asked.

"You've got to be joking. I've had an awful day. If I was allowed to swear I'd say I've had a b... terrible day."

Jan turned her back to hide her grin. "Now Pete, you know how Dad reacts to bad language."

"Well, it was. Old Dawson was in a lousy mood and we had him for a double period. He ought to retire, he's always cranky. To make matters worse, my calculator broke and I had to think all through maths. I'm wrung out, I'm so tired."

Maisie laughed, "Oh Pete, you can't be serious!"

"It wasn't funny Nan. It took me ages to work everything out and it was so damn hot." With that he dragged his tie from around his neck and took off down the hall to his room.

Maisie looked at Jan. "Is he serious?" she asked. "They don't really use calculators at school do they?"

"Yes Mum. Their Head is a very progressive thinker and sees no harm in using them in maths lessons."

"But that's ridiculous," Maisie returned, "there's nothing wrong with their brains. That's what they're for. Whatever is the world coming to? Not only are people becoming physically lazy, but now they're being encouraged to be mentally lazy. It's an absolute disgrace. Why, when I was at school....."

"Now Mum, how long ago was that? Things have changed."

"And not for the better either," Maisie exclaimed. "The teachers of 40 years ago could teach these modern educators a thing or two, I'll guarantee. We had some marvellous teachers when I was at high school. Strikes were unheard of, I might add, and teachers worked with and for the kids. The majority these days don't have the same dedication, more's the pity."

"Well, nothing ever stays the same Mum, you know that. One has to move with the times. Nothing else is the same as 40 years ago."

"I guess you're right," Maisie conceded, "but I still don't think it's the right way to teach young people."

Things settled down until a week later when Pete declared he had an essay to write. He took himself off to his room and sometime later Maisie poked her head in.

"How's it going, Pete?"

"A bit slow, Nan, I'm not really in the mood for it. Not that it makes much difference — half the time I bet Bert Harrison just puts a mark on the top and doesn't bother to read them. I've even tried him out and he didn't notice."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, once in the middle of an essay I wrote 'This is a real drag' and he didn't even see it. He marked it 17 out of 20! See what I mean?"

"I don't think it's a good idea to do that too often," Maisie was having trouble suppressing a smile. "Maybe you were just lucky that time, but it could have repercussions."

Maisie settled on the edge of his bed idly leafing through his books. Opening one she started to read. She blinked several times, shook her head then commenced reading again.

"..... rainfall is one of the mane

factors that influence climate. Areas with heavy falls have thicker vegetashun as well. Land masses between the tropics and the equator have the heaviest rainfalls. The vegetashun is thick with tropicle forests and the trees and plants struggle to servive."

Turning page after page she found much the same thing. The knowledge was there but the spelling was deplorable! She could scarcely credit what her eyes told her was there. Quietly she slipped out to the kitchen where Jan was humming over the peas she was shelling.

"Had a look at Pete's books lately?"

"Not unless he has a problem, why?"

"Well, he sure as heaven has that. Have you noticed his spelling? I can't believe it. It's atrocious! He spells as he speaks. Why haven't you done something about it?"

"Like what, Mum? What can I do? It's his weakness. Apart from that, he's an excellent scholar. He tops in science and maths....."

"With the aid of a calculator," reminded Maisie.

.. and is in the first three in Latin and French. Really he's doing very well,"

"Well it's certainly a laugh the way he spells. Manages French and Latin, but can't write his own language!" "I don't think people care enough these days," Maisie continued. "When I went to school we had a spelling test every day and every mistake had to be written 10 times. If we had more than three mistakes we had to stay after school until we learned them."

"But Mum, emphasis isn't placed on the same things these days. People specialise more and more, and after all, spelling doesn't make or break the world. If Pete's teachers go along with it, then we do likewise. He's happy, well-adjusted and a good scholar

so what's the point making his life a misery because he spells phonetically. I'm sure with Pete's scholastic ability he'll find a good niche for himself when he's older."

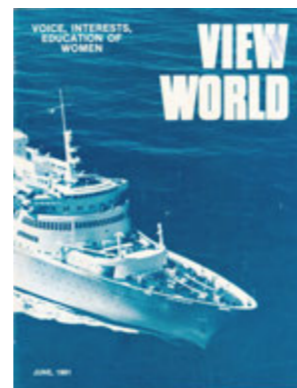
"It's to be hoped so," sighed Maisie. "What surprises me is that they haven't come up with something that spells for them. What with computers, calculators and now test tube babies, it seems to me that in another 50 years we won't be doing anything for ourselves."

"I don't think it will quite come to that Mum. Come on, leave that soapbox of yours and we'll have a quick cuppa."

"You know Jan, sometimes I think I'm becoming a fuddy-duddy. I try to keep up with things but I find it's impossible. Take art, for instance. You could hang some of it upside down, sideways, anyways — take your pick — and no one would know the difference. It still wouldn't look any good, not to me anyway. But some pseudo intellectual will come along and make knowing noises about it."

"You're just one of the old school Mum. Everything in its place and a place for everything; art that looks like art; everything spelt correctly and all the t's crossed. The world isn't like that anymore."

"No, I guess not," sighed Maisie. "Oh well, 'a rose by any other name would smell the same' as the saying goes. Let's have that cuppa and we'll drink to the English language 'as she is spoke'."



DOMINIC

VIEW World December 1975

Dominic is our recently acquired gardener-handyman.

Thea Barry

Having graduated from a house in an inner suburb to one further afield, we glory in every inch of our tree-filled acre. Thinking to make our burden light, we concentrated on achieving a park-like effect with a minimum of flower' beds and lawns, leaving the rest to nature.

In fact, we thought the wilderness was the nicest part of our garden. Some neighbours, however, did not agree and stupidly, in order to conform, we made too heavy a burden for our ageing backs. So, when Dominic turned up, looked us over, breathed into his soft Italian heart the beauty of our tree-filled lot and decided that we'd suit, we were deeply content to find ourselves firmly under his green thumb.

Language is a problem, but we cope with his Italian and he with our English and sound as though we're engaged in mortal combat. This, of course, is far from the case.

His arrival is announced with a sort of yodel-croak. Thereupon, we go out to meet him and discuss his duties for the day. He wrenches our hands with his bony one, asks after our health and, satisfied that all is well, gathers up his tools of trade, draws on his gloves with the air of a man about to cut a dash, and trundles his wheelbarrow off to work.

Constantly we are called upon to inspect and admire his work and we do not spare the praise because we like

him - and more to the point, we hope he likes us.

Apart from work, we would hate to lose him as we would miss his comic charge into the small arena of our lives. Once when I asked him if he would leave us, his kind brown eyes brimmed with laughter, his hard-worked hand patted mine, "No, missis. The nuns come first but you come next." This was not the first time I have taken second place to the nuns - nor to the brothers. But that is a different story.

At mid-morning, as instructed, we serve coffee--half milk and a little sugar.

Should scum rise to the surface through delay, it is rejected. Our Dominic is a perfectionist and should he spot a dead branch, even at this inconvenient time, he flies into a fury, seizes saw and hacks away. Even a blocked drain cannot wait and he sets to, tearing away like a terrier at a rat hole. Meanwhile the scum rises again and the coffee, reheated, is termed "No good." We have decided in future to serve tea. After all, one must set some limits.

His body seems to consist of bones strung together with sinews and covered by a stretch of skin. Of flesh there seems little. Sometimes he asks if he may 'phone his sister and the flow of Italian in rapid staccato almost shatters the house - they both speak at once. It is a wordy encounter on a constant collision course.

His wife is an invalid in hospital in Italy and as he must send money abroad to keep her, his need of work is great. Thinking to help him we suggested he work for friends and were smartly put to rights. His eyes flashed as he demanded "Are they nice?" It seems we must pass a test or we do not qualify.

The inevitable day came when Dominic failed us. Had we made the

coffee too scummy (of course, we had reverted to coffee)? Had some scoundrel filched him from us? Had the nuns exerted their priority and pounced on him for an extra day - our day?

As the hours passed, we despaired. The winter sun set through the trees - even the garden took on an air of desolation. Birds sang their last songs, the kookas gave their last chortles, evening descended. Then in the dusk we saw a slim figure gliding up our winding path. Dominic.

We went out to learn our fate. With no greeting Dominic flung himself into a backward arc and with his hands described a swift, wide semi-circle above his concave stomach and said, "Baby. Sister. Hospital!"

Interpreting these gymnastics as meaning that his sister had been taken to hospital and Dominic had been called upon in the emergency, we asked, "Boy or girl?"

He shrugged. "Boy. Girl. Either."

"How do you mean Dominic? It must be either a boy or a girl. Unless it's twins?"

"Maybe."

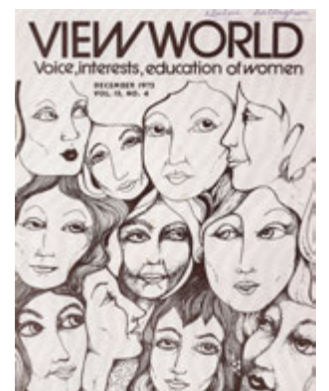
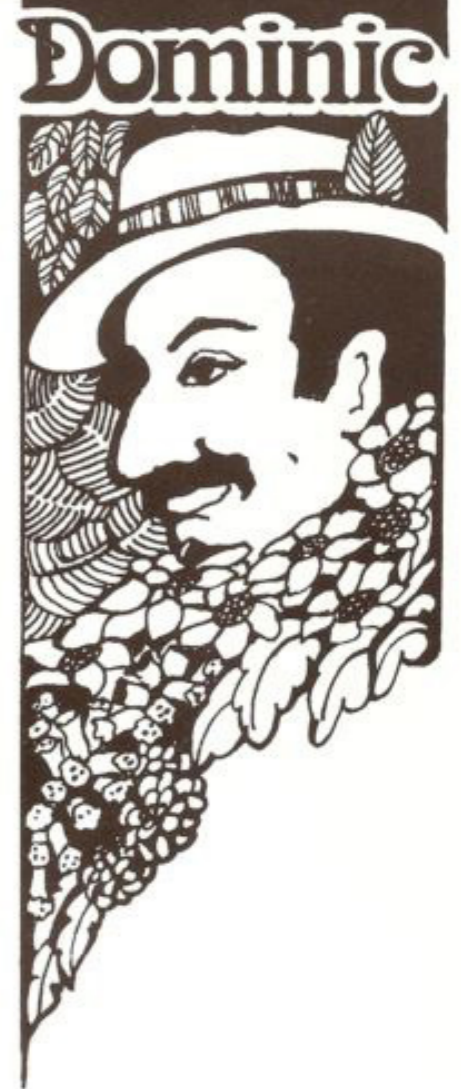
"You mean it's not born yet?"

"That's right." He nodded so vigorously that it seemed his frail neck might snap.

"That's right. Sister. Baby. Hospital!"

So that was it - Dominic was in the apparently slow process of becoming an uncle. We gave him a bottle of beer to celebrate, watched him disappear into the night and came inside.

We are safe for Dominic also said, "Next week, I come."





THE GREEN DRESS

It's much too expensive," exclaimed Michelle's grandmother. "You do spoil that girl."

"Nonsense, Mum!" Jean tried not to sound irritated. "She's a good kid and she deserves a bit of pampering."

"She gets more than a bit, if you ask me! When I think of my own teenage years, and even yours, I think parents today have lost all common-sense."

"That's not true. It's just that parents today have a somewhat different attitude to the needs and rights of young people."

"Rights!" exploded Mrs Blunt. "Do you think Michelle has a right to such a frock, just for a school dance?"

"Of course not! But it's not just a school dance. It's an important occasion, the anniversary of the school and Michelle's first formal

dance. We want her to enjoy it!"

"I'm sure she could enjoy it in something less than an expensive dress from a top line store."

"You'll make her very selfish."

Jean's mouth set in a thin line. It was no use arguing with her mother. She knew that very well. It only made Jean herself uptight.

Mrs Blunt saw the look and realised that she had been tactless again. "It's a beautiful colour," she said in a conciliatory tone. "It will suit Michelle perfectly, with that touch of auburn in her hair."

Jean was silent.

She and her mother had often clashed, but this time Mrs Blunt had gone too far. The reference to making Michelle selfish had really hurt.

Jean and her husband, Bob, had been careful not to show favouritism to Michelle because of her serious hearing problem, although, in earlier years, her mother had frequently suggested that they did. Now she kept her comments to more general criticisms of the upbringing of their three children, but Jean knew that implicit in that was a judgement that they were too lenient with Michelle.

This was quite unfair. Apart from the special teaching she had received, she had always been treated in exactly the same way as her siblings. This attitude had paid off and she had become a 15-year-old who was well balanced and resourceful, and no more selfish than any other girl of her age; in fact, rather less so, Jean felt.

Michelle and her friends in Year 10 could talk of nothing but the formal in the weeks preceding it. They all had new frocks and there was a high tide of excitement each day as they discussed their outfits and their escorts.

Michelle was unperturbed by the fact that she did not have a steady boyfriend, confident that when she appeared at the dance in her glamorous green dress she would have no lack of partners,

“Will you take me to the formal?” she asked her brother, Andrew, a fortnight before the event.

“No way,” he answered predictably.

“Why not?”

“Because I wouldn’t be seen dead there, especially with my sister.”

“Meanie,” exclaimed Michelle, but she was not perturbed. She still had two weeks in which to work on him.

He was a quiet young man, an outstanding Year 12 student, not much interested in anything but his studies, so Michelle knew he would not be easily persuaded and was astonished when he capitulated after two days. Then she guessed there had been some parental intervention.

“I’ll take you on condition that I don’t have to dance,” he said firmly.

“Andrew, how can you be so stubborn? I don’t want to go and just sit.”

“You shouldn’t have to. After all that’s been spent on your dress. But, take it or leave it, that’s my offer.”

Michelle decided to take it. Andrew wasn’t exactly a fun person but he was good-looking and had a pleasant manner. She would be proud to have him as her escort.

The accident happened late on the Monday before the dance.

Michelle had little recollection of it afterwards, except that she had seen a car approaching at high speed, when she had half-completed the right turn at the bottom of her own street. She had pedalled furiously but the car had clipped the edge of her back wheel, causing her to be thrown heavily against the kerb.

As the speeding driver had failed to stop, it was fortunate that a neighbour, driving slowly towards her from the opposite direction, had seen it all.

By the time the ambulance arrived, Michelle’s mother had been sent for and she rode with her daughter to the hospital, and waited in a state of desperate anxiety, until all the investigations had been carried out and broken bones set.

Bob had joined her by the time Michelle was wheeled past, to be put to bed in a large hospital ward, and they were greatly relieved to know that the ugly lacerations down the side of her face were superficial and that the leg and arm fractures were not serious.

“My bike,” she murmured, when Jean and Bob went to stand beside her bed.

“It’s all right, darling. Andrew was taking it home and I’m sure it can be fixed.” Jean was not sure at all, but her concern was not for the bike.

As she looked down on her child, lying injured and vulnerable, she relived the guilt she had felt when she had been told that Michelle had a grave hearing problem, as a result of her own attack of rubella in early pregnancy. At that time it had been the guilt of having caused her daughter, even unwittingly, such a great affliction.

Now she felt guilty for having allowed her to ride her bike on a busy street and sustain these injuries.

“Don’t feel that way.” Said Bob, on the way home. “You know we made a

calculated decision to allow Michelle to do all the things the other children do, within reason; and this is the very first accident she has had which may be due to her deafness.”

“Yes, I guess you’re right,” answered Jean exhaustedly. “It just gets to me at times like this. It’s been such a shock.”

Bob squeezed her hand, and they drove home in silence.

Michelle left hospital next day in a hired wheelchair, and as soon as the car started moving she mentioned the dance.

“I won’t be able to wear my beautiful frock,” she lamented, and Jean could think of no reply.

She had not even admitted to Bob that she had shed tears the night before, when she had gone into Michelle’s room and seen the green dress hanging in the wardrobe, awaiting its grand debut. “Perhaps you could go in the wheelchair,” she said at last, knowing that this was not a practical suggestion.

“Mum, you know that would be ridiculous, especially with my face like this. I’ll just have to keep it for another time.”

“Couldn’t you return it to the shop?” enquired Mrs Blunt, when she and Mr Blunt came over later to see Michelle.

“We can’t. Gran. It’s been altered slightly. But I’m sure I’ll be able to wear it eventually.”

Michelle spoke in a steady voice, determined not to show her disappointment.

“You aren’t the only one who isn’t going to the formal,” said 12-year-old Kerry, at dinner that evening.

“Mandy said that Lisa isn’t going either.”

“Why?” Michelle’s voice expressed her surprise. “She’s perfectly well now, isn’t she? She looks great,”

She remembered Lisa, several years before when she had been pale and weak and had worn a wig to cover her hairless head.

“Yes,” answered Kerry, “her leukaemia is cured. But Mandy said Lisa wouldn’t even ask her mother if she could go, as she would need a new dress and they haven’t had much money since their father died. Lisa’s treatment cost a lot, too.”

“Oh, I’m sorry” said Michelle.

“She’s a very nice girl. Not exactly my type, she’s so studious. But she deserves a break.”

Jean wondered what was coming next morning when, after Bob had left for work and Andrew and Kerry for school, Michelle said hesitantly: “Mum, there’s something I want to ask you.”

“Yes, sweetie, ask away.”

“Well, it’s about the green dress. I wondered if you and Dad would mind if I offered to lend it to Lisa, so that she can go to the formal. We’re about the same size, so I’m sure it would fit her.”

“Why, Michelle, of course we wouldn’t mind. But are you sure you want to do that?” You were so excited about that frock. It wouldn’t be quite the same once it had been worn.”

“That’s okay, Mum.

I’ve thought a lot about it and I’d like Lisa to have it. The poor kid’s been through so much.”

“That’s very sweet of you, darling.” Jean hugged her daughter tightly while she blinked away her tears.

Andrew was reluctant to take anyone but Michelle to the dance, but agreed when she insisted that she would only be happy about missing it if Lisa could go in her place.

Lisa was not easily persuaded either. Her long illness had brought

a considerable maturity and independence and she did not want to be pitied.

But this was something with which Michelle had always had to contend and she managed to assure her reluctant classmate that empathy, rather than pity was her motivation.

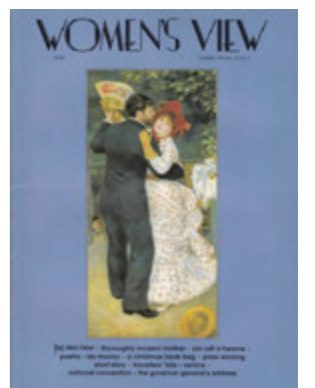
Lisa looked stunning in the green dress. When she walked in, with her brother, Mark, for Michelle to see her before she and Andrew left for the dance, she exuded vivacity and happiness.

“I’ll never forget what you’ve done,” she said softly, as she bent to hug and kiss Michelle in her wheelchair.

Mr and Mrs Blunt joined Michelle and her parents and Mark to wave the young couple off.

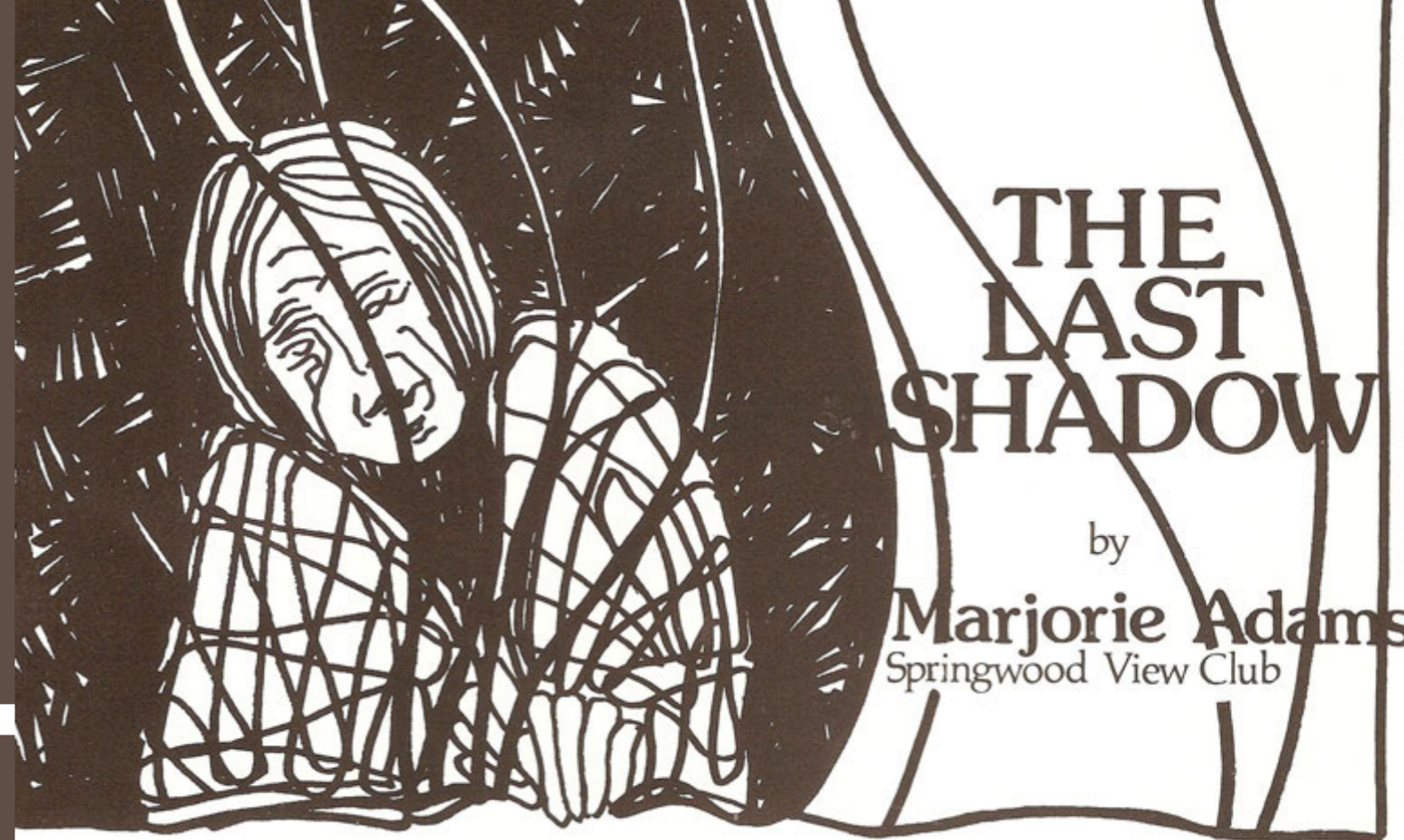
When the car — borrowed from Bob — had turned the corner, Mark began to push Michelle up the sloping drive, while Bob and Mr Blunt followed and Jean and her mother brought up the rear.

Quite suddenly, Mrs Blunt placed a hand on her daughter’s arm and Jean was staggered when she said: “My dear, I must apologise. I’ve misjudged you and Bob. You haven’t brought Michelle up to be selfish at all; in fact, quite the contrary, and I’m immensely proud of my grand-daughter.”



THE LAST SHADOW

Marjorie Adams
Springwood VIEW Club



Her slippered feet made no sound on the dusty carpet as she shuffled over to the window. Parting the curtains, she peered out into the garden. No one there. But she was sure . . . Perhaps it was one of those dreadful boys throwing stones at the front door.

There were secret sounds everywhere in the old house, but they were woven into the pattern of the days and nights and did not disturb her. Rats scuttling among the heaps of yellow newspapers; broken-latched casement windows creaking in the wind; beams stretching in the sleep that had lasted a hundred years.

And the whispering. That went on softly, dreamily, as she moved from room to room—sometimes close to her ear, at other times echoing down the dark stairway or around her bed as she drifted into sleep. Loved voices from the past. Mother and Father who had died so long ago that their tones were faint and far away; Arthur, her lover, lost at sea, murmuring tender love words; and Georgiana, her sister,

laughing teasingly.

And now it was all to end. The house was to be pulled down to make way for a new underground railway. The voices would cry in the emptiness, drifting on the wind. And she would be cast out among strangers.

This terror stalked beside her as she wandered about the old house, its cold breath clouding the presence of her loved ones. They could not reach her through the veil of fearful nights and shuddering days.

Since she had stooped to pick up the envelope which some unknown hand had pushed under the front door and forced herself to open it and read the black words on the paper, this terror had never left her.

Time passed and she had received other letters. How many she did not remember, but she knew they came from the enemy who pressed in on her from every side.

Father, Mother, Arthur, Georgy — she must protect them from this monster.

**THE
LAST
SHADOW**
by
Marjorie Adams
Springwood View Club

But what could she do? The doors and windows had been barred long ago, after Georgy died. People had said then that she should sell the great, lonely house set in its wilderness of suburban garden and get herself a snug apartment.

Voices and threatening hands had tried to tear her from her lost loves. This house in which she had been born and where those loved ones had died — it was part of her every being.

She had thought that Mr Snelling, her trustee, would have understood, but his voice had been one of the loudest advising her to move. Sell the place and make a large profit! Go for a trip around the world! Enjoy yourself!

Once, long ago when they were young, Georgy had hoped that he would ask her to marry him, but he had married his secretary instead. It hadn't mattered after a while. Life had settled into a smooth stream of days and nights — reading the old, loved books; working at their tapestry frames; going to church every Sunday morning; making clothing for the

foreign mission. A ritual of living that had satisfied their every need.

But Georgy had followed her other loved ones into the Shadow Land and now, in her despair, she had no one to turn to. Her weekly grocery order, left at the back door by Mr Cook from the local corner store, was the only touch she had with the outside world.

In desperation she had thought of asking him for help, but a vision of his round, red face floated before her and she cringed. He would laugh and advise her, like everyone else, to "sell the bloody place and make a packet".

She could not remember when she had become aware of the sounds outside the stone walls of her home. Indistinct at first, they had at last resolved into the crash of masonry and the muffled voices of men and machines.

The outside world was closing its great jaws around her life and crushing it to dust.

Then came the knocking at the doors and windows and the voices demanding entrance. Demands which had turned to threats.

The nights were the worst. The electricity and gas had been cut off. She had to eat uncooked food — but it didn't matter, she was getting past the need of eating — and go to bed in the dark.

The sounds had come menacingly close that day and now, in the darkness, she crouched on the lower step of the great staircase listening to the silence.

But they would be back as soon as it was light.

The very rats had gone. After so many years of companionship their desertion was a trouble to her confused mind. Now she was completely alone.

Father, Mother, where are you? I am so afraid.

Was that a movement in the blackness at the head of the stairs? She shrank into a bundle of terror, afraid to look up. Had THEY got in at last?

Soft movements seemed to fill the landing and begin to flow down the stairs, deliberately, remorselessly. Blindly, she staggered to her feet and rushed to the front door. Help! Help! Her voice, unused for so long, struggled hopelessly to escape from her dry throat as, with icy fingers, she fought the great bolt that had protected her for so long from the outside world.

Now it was the enemy refusing to release her from the terror.

At last, creaking rustily, it yielded and the door opened. In flooded the moonlight, driving out the darkness of years.

But the frantic figure saw nothing of its shining glory as, sobbing with relief, she stumbled down the steep steps and collapsed in a small, lonely bundle at the foot.

In the morning the Council officials came for a last attempt at making the old lady see reason. To point out that she was holding up the march of progress and promise her a nice flat in a high-rise building with hundreds of other old men and women for companion-ship.

"Good Lord, the door's open!" The fat official's surprise was tempered with satisfaction. "She must have come to her senses at last."

"What's that near the steps?" The younger man pointed over his companion's shoulder.

Together they hurried across the unkept lawn to the dark bundle on the path and knelt beside it. "It's the old lady, stone dead and cold. Must have been lying here all night." The fat official's face had paled.

"I wonder what drove her out?" The younger official was troubled. "Who knows!" The fat official stood up, "but what-ever it was saved us a lot of trouble." Satisfaction brought back his colour and briskness.

"Shouldn't we take her inside? Doesn't seem decent to leave her lying here."

Better not. I'll contact the police and a doctor and they'll get her to the morgue." The fat official went off whistling.

But the younger man was uneasy. The small, wrinkled face still held traces of terror. She, the holder-up of the mighty works that were to solve the traffic problems, unseen by any of the angry officials until this moment, and regarded as a female ogre?

The younger official felt that something in this best-of-all-possible worlds was very wrong. But what?

Not his problem, thank goodness. He got up from his knees and lighting a cigarette, leaned against the wall while he waited for the body to be removed.



VIEW World December 1982

SATURDAY MORNING SATURNALIA

Honour Tindal-Vines
Cronulla VIEW Club

With a surname like Bright, surely it was no coincidence my parents christened me Honour. Whether motivated by facetiousness or sheer stupidity, they refused to discuss. If early marriage had not rescued me, I would have altered, by Deed Poll, this calculated affront to my self-esteem.

Growing up during the "Depression" thirties, over-protected child of doting parents, even at 16 I was only sketchily acquainted with the facts of life. To my miserably inhibited mother such things were unmentionable, so that mostly all I heard were faint rumblings about White Slaves, a Fate Worse than Death, and Getting into Trouble. Also, should I tarnish our name, threats of banishment the likes of which aroused and alarmed my curiosity, bringing about whisperings embroidered by schoolmates' imaginations.

Following my seventeenth birthday and the end of school, it was little wonder I became innocently embroiled in a bacchanal aboard a four-masted sailing vessel destined for the shipbreakers, rusting out in Sydney harbour. It happened one Saturday evening at a charity entertainment, far from home territory.

At first my parents disapproved of my attending the novel party, which compared with today's amusements would seem about as dissolute as a church social. Organised by a younger set, composed chiefly of young people from Sydney's Eastern Suburbs upper crust, proceeds were to benefit a large hospital for crippled children.

A few of the committee members were known to my parents who were eventually persuaded that young girls were quite safe in a crowd. They consented, provided I was accompanied by either a chaperone or my new young gentleman, Peter Tindall-Vines, 22. His double-barrelled name, prestige car and impeccable manners impressed my father and besotted my mother — such a "catch"!

According to my parents, "nice" girls retired at 10pm, which in the circumstances would have been impossible, as we lived in the Inner Western Suburbs. However, I arranged to stay over-night with party organisers Monica and Phyllis Downes in their flat at Potts Point, having lied to Mother about a widowed aunt sharing it with sisters. Peter, who lived nearby, promised to drive me home next morning early, in time for church.

On Saturday evening he dropped me off at the flat to deposit my night attire as well as a cream sponge for the fictitious aunt. We were to be transported in launch loads from a jetty close to the ship which was anchored out in the stream. Much local interest surrounded this freely advertised novelty, there being something romantically piratical about a windjammer!

Having only ever attended "dry" church or school functions with Mother or an aunt, though at intervals furtively retreating to puff "Wild Woodbines" in the Ladies' lavatory, I still knew nothing of the pitfalls of alcohol, which at home was strictly tabooed.

As steamy weather made everybody thirsty, the only "soft" stuff left when we clambered aboard was Coke, which I detest to this day! I said iced water would do, so one of Peter's cronies went to fetch it and returned clutching a tall tumbler filled with crushed ice floating in very fiery water indeed.

Polite, agonisingly shy, despite a burned throat and tongue, about ten minutes later under amused surveillance, I had downed most of it. Then knees sagging, I keeled over, unaware it was neat gin! It was a brainless prank cooked up by Peter's mob, who no doubt evilly hoped it would be an aphrodisiac instead of an anaesthetic.

Close to midnight, a jazz band still blared on deck. I remained horizontal

on some rotting sail sheets until Monica shook me, muttering about a private "do" aboard a VIP's yacht which had come alongside. Nauseous, but with her help, I staggered to my feet while at least half a dozen moons circled the sky and my legs billowed like noodles in boiling water.

"Where'sh Peter?" I croaked, then with paralysed undercarriage collapsed again on deck. Monica warned me that as I'd passed out for so long, Peter had gone off with another girl he could get some sense out of, and to stick with her and Phyllis.

Like myself, both stoned to the eyeballs, they hauled me to the diabolical ladder beneath which the big yacht rocked, a young sea-dog waiting on deck to give us a hand aboard. Monica told me not to look down.

With more luck than expertise, she and Phyl landed safely, whilst I tottered on the upper deck exhaling sultry fumes. Suddenly one foot slipped, and with a demented shriek I hurtled to the murk below. I surfaced having swallowed copious quantities of harbour. Even though I knew how to swim, or at least stay afloat, it proved nearly impossible when badly shocked, stoned, and fully dressed as well. While I floundered around clinging to the yacht and gasping for dear life, a male voice above yelled "HEY!! THERE'S A SHEILA IN THE DRINK!!"

It was indeed a miracle that I wasn't drowned or killed outright. Grabbing wildly at a lifebuoy ring someone tossed, I was hauled aboard by two crewmen and delivered to the master cabin. The girls removed my ruined clothes, towelled me dry, then wrapping me in a capacious sheet, skipped off leaving me bewildered, sick and scared.

Above on the sailing ship revelry was rising to an ear-splitting crescendo.

After fountaining up a cocktail of gin and harbour, I gazed exhaustedly about the cabin which was going round in circles. The cold plunge had sobered me and slowly my senses were returning. The glass was missing from my wristwatch, which had stopped. Waterlogged! As for shoes and handbag - rock bottom in Davy Jones' Locker. There were no wet-suited stalwarts in those days to recover sunken treasure!

Knowing I would later be disowned I wept, while picturing Mother's outraged loss of face. The neighbours... the disgrace! To make matters worse, in the meantime the jackal Press had boarded both vessels. Wretched, with no idea of the time, I passed out again till daylight, when I woke affectionately cradled by a middle-aged man wearing little but a fatuous smile.

"Better now ducks?" he breathed beerily. "How about coffee or a hair o' dog?"

DOG? Oh dear... no doubt we were miles out to sea headed for the mainland of China... these kidnappers were white slave traders! Worse still, like my bunk mate I was wearing nothing, except a sheet clutched defensively around me. Maybe my brain was damaged by the fall from such a height.

"Who are YOU?" I bawled.

"The skipper. Now don't get steamed up again", he soothed, sliding off the bunk to hand me a mug of coffee while I turned outraged eyes to the wall.

"Listen matey, you're still all in one piece! Better get this under your belt. Put some life in you."

Had I been older, more experienced and less befuddled, I might have realised coffee was possibly not the sole means of dispensing life aboard this vessel.

"What's y' name girlie?" he asked good-humouredly.

"Honour"

"Honour what?"

"Bright"

"Huh! Smartass. Oh well, a shower, s'make-up 'n you'll be apples! How old are you?"

"Seventeen. Where are we please?"

"Headed for a sheikdom in the Eastern desert, and a harem. Ha! Ha! No... I'm joshin' you darlin'...strange though it may seem, we're in ROSE BAY!"

Yawning, he donned shorts and walked out on deck. I never saw him again.

Bolting the door, I staggered into still sodden, skin-tight garments which had been festooned round the cabin drying. Monica, in a foul mood, froze me.

Later ashore, when finally a good-natured milkman dropped us at the flat, I followed her to the door through which I could see Phyllis collapsing into bed, clothes and all.

"Out ya get brat", sneered Monica, "home to mummy! Bl'y li'l nuisance... y'ruined everything!" Then flinging me my nightie, slammed the door in my face.

Barefoot, demoralised, I twanged the bell but they refused to answer. However would I get home without money? I merely wanted my fare that was all! Hitch-hike with another wolf? Walk nine miles and arrive next week to be locked out, belongings on the doorstep packed and addressed to a Home for Bad Girls? The Police hunting for me? Not to mention severely jellied feet!

Squatting on the kerb, once again I wept, when suddenly a car pulled up. It was PETER! Never was I so glad to see anyone. Staring at my sea-weedy hair and bare feet, he began to laugh.

"Thought I might find you here" he said.

"Peter! It's not funny! Whatever happened? You ditched me!"

"Ditched you? Come off it! You hit the deck, then Wham!"

"Your friends doped me...you knew didn't you...oh, Peter how could you?"

"We thought you'd know how to hold your grog! Anyway, it was Monica's idea. She fancies me and you were in the way. I quit, she's not my cuppa"

"Peter, Mother'll kill me" I grizzled. "Please take me home".

As the miles sped by, I poured out my woes. Smelling like hardened alcos, our thirst was all-consuming, the taste in my mouth solid. What did people see in a drink...ghastly stuff.....

When we arrived it was past sun-up and the newspapers had been delivered. Mother dealt me a stinger over the ear-hole which was humiliating enough at my age. Then ignoring Peter's apologies, piously made us tea and toast in the kitchen. Wearing her "good woman's hat", she was ready for church.

Silently, my father tossed us the Sunday Sun, then retreated with "awful majesty". Lurid headlines scorched the front page, "SUNDAY MORNING SATURNALIA ON HARBOUR! Drunken Girls Fall Screaming in Water From Sailing Ship!"

For the first time I saw my parents in a different light. They were boring suburban bigots. How parents in more sophisticated families would laugh at them! Peter's mother, for example, who was an elegant, knowledgeable lady.

"What a load of bull!" hissed Peter, then bluntly mumbling "see you in church" he left us. Certainly I did not expect to see him in church,

or anywhere else for that matter. Listening to his car roar away up the road, I burst into tears.

Mother blasted me. I was depraved. She would pray for my sinful behaviour and our besmirched reputation. She had broadcast to the neighbourhood that I would be attending this "society" party. Serve her right! It was so...well, working class, the lower orders.

And that dreadful man on the yacht! To what shameful depths had I sunk? Recalling past illusions to the evils of drink, the lusts of men and eternal damnation, shame blanketed me, the first of the trinity already bitter experience. Both parents ignored me.

Further mail addressed to me, Mother grabbed and scrutinised. Unless in plaster from neck to knee, with a bodyguard of Dobermans, future invitations remained unanswered, until they finally disappeared altogether. I was one big joke.

However, restrictions later relaxed a little and I landed an office job during the wait till my twenty-first birthday. To my joy, mother thawed out and Peter returned, and the following year we were married.

Now, parents as well as grandparents of girls ourselves, although aware of the everlasting dangers that beset womankind, unlike Mother who would never have survived today's society, our policy has not been "lock up your daughters!"



Chrys Russell
Twin Towns VIEW Club
1st Prize Short Story Competition

00:02

MINUTES OF
CHRISTMAS

One week to Christmas Day.

I picked up a library book and sat in the rocker, but couldn't concentrate on the story. I tried knitting — squares for a rug — but soon put it down.

I wandered around the house, then stood at the kitchen window, looking out at the great mountains.

How to fill in the days?

The church socials, craft classes and Senior Citizens had stopped for the 'festive season' — what a silly phrase! Even the Mike Walsh show was off — just stupid old films on the telly.

My good friend Amy had asked me to join them for Christmas dinner but no — she was expecting her own family.

Mine wouldn't be here.

Daughter-in-law Anne had said she simply must have a holiday so they went away. Jimmy sent a parcel — stockings and — would you believe? — a cookery book. Since Michael died, it's enough effort to boil an egg.

I miss Michael so much — nearly forty years married. I touched his watch, always on my wrist.

Of course Jimmy would ring STD on Christmas morning. Big deal! Two minutes of Christmas. Don't be silly! Self-pity is weakness. Think about the happy Christmases you had as a child, and when Jimmy was young. The excitement, the laughter, the contentment.

No, don't think about the past. Go for a walk, the fresh air will be good.

I locked the house and started towards the beach, then suddenly decided to go the other way — west, past the church and up the hill.

It was a cold and blue day. I stepped out briskly, looking at people, houses and gardens. As I began to tire and was ready to turn back, I saw a large house with a sign, 'Child Care Centre.'

I paused, then walked to the door. The woman who answered was middle-aged, with a pleasant smile.

"I wondered, I've got time to spare, could you use some help for a while?"

"That's very kind of you, er. . ." "Emma Wilson."

"I'm Elaine Sinclair. Very kind, Mrs. Wilson, but we're allowed to employ only trained nursery staff."

Didn't she understand? "I'm not interested in 'employment', I said. "I just thought I might be able to help — wash up or something."

I waited tensely. This was suddenly important. Then she said. "Come in and I'll show you round."

The noise deafened me — about twenty children playing, squabbling, laughing,

It was wonderful.

A small boy came rushing to me and clasped my legs. "I'm John, come and play."

"I'm Emma. I'm going to wash the cups for Miss Sinclair."

He ran off, shouting in a sing-song voice, over and over, "Emma's going to wash the cups, Emma's going to wash the cups".

"They all look very happy, Miss Sinclair." "Really they're squabbling more than usual. They get dissatisfied with everything, waiting for Father Christmas to bring new toys."

Yes — those last days before Christmas. I stayed for some time, pouring juice, washing cups, mopping the floor. Occasionally I stopped to watch the children. My little friend John was lively and energetic — laughing one minute, ready to fight the next.

I went to the Centre for the next week, working in the kitchen, or watching

Elaine and her helper, Madge, play games and read stories. I even enjoyed the noise. By the time I got home I was tired, but contented.

Christmas Day. A bright, warm morning — if it mattered.

I had finished breakfast when Jimmy's phone call came. Christmas — for two minutes.

I put on hat and gloves and went to the early church service. There were few there, a pity, because the flowers were beautiful and the service joyous. I joined in singing "Come All Ye Faithful" and "Silent Night". When the minister said, "Unto us a child is born", I blinked away tears.

One hour's church and two minutes' telephone call — that's Christmas.

I didn't want to go home to an empty house and lonely meal. I postponed that moment by deciding to walk, and went towards the Child Centre. It would be closed today. But as I neared the house, I saw the open door and heard a child crying.

Elaine Sinclair answered my knock. I said, "I thought I heard someone here". "This morning a man brought little John Stevens and said his mother was sick. He's crying because he wants to go home to Mum."

"I didn't think the Centre would be open today." "It isn't. But I was here — I have a flat at the back — and didn't have the heart to refuse John. I'll have to take him home soon, sickness or not — I've arranged to go to my family."

"Miss Sinclair, could I take him home, either to my place or to his own? I'd be glad to look after him."

"Well, I don't know.... All right, we'll both take him home. I've met John's mother, but I don't know if you will like the place."

"Why?"

"You'll see."

Elaine clasped the boy's hand and we set off. As I looked in the open door of John's home, I gasped. The front room was a shambles — empty glasses and bottles, full ash-trays, rubbish and spills on the floor. Stale smells of cigarettes and something like incense.

I looked at Elaine, who just nodded.

A young woman came from the back of the house. She wore a grubby dressing-gown, her hair was pushed into spikes around her head, her face was very white. She wore no rings.

I felt sick and angry. Who was the man who left John with Elaine this morning? Was this the permissive society? Then as I looked at that white, sullen face, my anger dissolved into pity. In any case, John was the important one.

Elaine introduced us. I said, "I've brought John home, because Miss Sinclair is busy. I thought perhaps I could do something to help."

Mary Stevens looked at me without interest. "Please yourself," she said, and left the room. A door banged shut.

Elaine looked at me. "Are you sure you want to stay?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Well, all right. Thank you. I'll go then."

John was happy now. He brought a collection of toys from his room. His favourite was a little car, which he pushed around the kitchen floor, making "vroom vroom" noises.

"Look what I got from Farver Kissmas, Em," he laughed.

At least he had been given some Christmas presents. I might as well do something while I stayed with him. I found I hadn't forgotten the art of working while stepping around a small child and his toys.

I cleaned the front room and washed the glasses. There was no sign of

Mary Stevens, so I went on working. I found a chicken in the fridge, put it in the oven and prepared a salad. It was a long time since I had done so much work in a short space, but I was happy, and hummed a tune.

John was a good little boy. He played with his toys and chattered away to them and to me. But as I moved from one room to another, he followed me, occasionally clutching at my skirt. Insecure? Or just being a child.

He brought paper and crayons and presented me with a weird mess of colours.

Remembering old times, I said, "John, that's lovely!"



"It's you, Em."

"Yes, I know, John, and it's really very good." "You can have it for Kissmas." Better than a cookery book.

I found a clean tablecloth and picked some flowers for a centrepiece.

John demanded, "Story, Em!"

"Please," I said automatically.

"Please, Em."

He handed me 'Peter Rabbit'. Another link with the past. I sat down and he scrambled on to my lap and snuggled against me.

Although he couldn't read, he knew the story, told me some, giggled in places and said "Ooh!" in others.

Suddenly Mary Stevens was at the door, dressed in clean jeans and shirt, still pale-faced.

"Mummy!" John ran to grab her hand. She ignored him and looked at me. "Who are you?"

"I'm Emma Wilson. I help out at the Child Centre and I just thought..."

"You've cleaned up, and I can smell something cooking. Why are you doing this?" Her eyes were guarded, her manner abrupt.

"I met John at the Centre and he wanted to come home so..."

Why was I doing this? "I suppose because it's Christmas."

"Christmas —— huh."

Her expression softened. "Yes, well — you're very kind, Mrs. Wilson."

I hadn't been told to leave, so supposed I could stay. I said, "Are you feeling better?"

Could you eat some dinner? It's about ready."

"Yes. I'll help you dish up."

John said, "Drink, please."

Mary Stevens got three glasses and poured lemonade. I took a deep breath and raised my glass. "Happy Christmas to you both!"

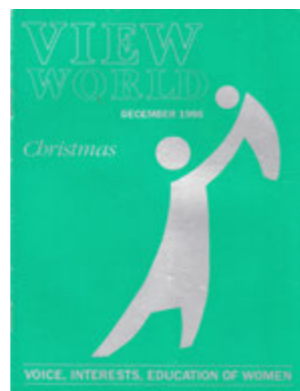
John giggled, his little-boy high-pitched giggle. "Happy Kissmas, Em."

Mary Stevens smiled at me.

"Happy Christmas."

All day, not just for two minutes.

For unto us a child is born



Cathy's Cathy

Lillian Archer
Tumut VIEW Club.

As he sat on the bedside chair putting on his shoes, Cathy's once-devoted husband considered their marriage. The scales were heavily weighted against its lasting much longer.

Six years in all? Good grief no! They couldn't live through another three like the last, their tempers fraying like a piece of old rope.

Standing up, he twitched his trousers into the correct alignment with his shoes and lifted from the chair the main cause of their troubles. He hadn't realised he had been sitting on it, but as he tossed it onto the bed, not caring which way up it landed, he felt no compunction whatsoever.

Cathy was standing in the doorway. "You've done it again," she said. "You're so insensitive!"

"I'd no idea it was there," Robert protested. "It has no bones, but somehow it gets all over the place, with its skinny legs and tiny feet."

Cathy stamped her foot — a childish habit carried into adulthood and absorbed into marriage. "She! She! Not it. You never concede her anything, not even sex!"

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

"Sex," said Robert, his voice aggravatingly bewildered. "I don't know much about it, but I wouldn't think any sane person could credit it...her...it, with sex."

"Will there be any breakfast this morning?"

"There will be...as soon as I've..."

"Oh yes, when you've put little Cathy to bed, read her a fairy story and sung her the song of a sad, sad marriage."

Cathy came further into the room and Robert continued. "Why can't she sleep at night? Like I do. Sometimes, I sleep the sleep of the dead — dead tired of that yellow-haired idol known to everyone as Cathy's Cathy. That lank-legged monster has shared our bed ever since our wedding night, sitting up on its own little pillow with its eyes wide open."

CATHY'S CATHY

by Lillian Archer, Tumut Club



"She's not a monster," Cathy flared. Taking the monster in her arms, she put its skinny legs around her waist and laid her cheek against its flat face. "She's beautiful and she's been my life, my comfort, my only child!"

"Yes," Robert said, quietly. "She's been all of that. To you. But what do you think she's been to me?"

Suddenly the doll was flung at him from across the bed. "You're jealous," Cathy said. "Men are jealous of all kinds of odd things."

"And none odder than this. A female spider as a pet might have done less damage."

Robert was clutching the doll, its limp arms hanging over his arms, its head lolling back as it stared up at him. "While I go about looking like a tatterdemalion outcast, this ~ this thing is dressed like an oil magnate's No. 1 wife, with its own little wardrobe, its own little coat hangers and a row of dinky-winky shoes. It's an out-moded symbol of... you know what ... an anthropomorphic doll!"

Cathy began to whimper, but he was relentless. "I'm going to get rid of it. Right away!"

With the doll hanging by one foot, he moved towards the door.

"Oh no, no, no," Cathy moaned. "I must have someone to love, someone to dress and undress!"

"You can start loving me and dressing and undressing yourself. But not now I'm late already!"

As the door closed behind him, Cathy took the little pillow in her arms and began to sway to and fro, humming an old-fashioned lullaby.

Coming back, Robert stood watching her, waiting for her comment.

"What did you do with..... Oh, it's you who are the monster," she said.

Pausing, he savoured his victory — over her and over himself. "I took her by the left leg and threw her down the stairs," he said. "And.... if that small wardrobe, which is mine by the way, is not bone empty when I come home tonight, I'll do the same to you."

He took her hands and put them around his neck.

"I want my little Cathy," she gulped.

"And I want mine," he said, kissing her with magnanimous ardour.

"You used to call me your child wife," she reminded him.

"I know, I know. But that was the least of my mistakes!"

"I want a daughter," she whispered.

"I know that, too," he said.

"I can't guarantee a daughter, but anything will be better than that leering prototype we've had in bed with us for so long."

"Now, what about breakfast?"

I'm hungry. One way and another, I've been hungry for years."

With their arms around each other, they were on their way out when Cathy stopped him.

"Rob," she said. "We haven't any stairs!"

"No matter," he replied, pushing her before him. "She's head down in the garbage can, one dinky-winky little foot sticking out from under the broken lid!"



VIEW WORLD. MARCH 1979

Heaven Only Knows

Val Crawley
Belmont VIEW Club
Commended Short Story Competition

“How do you feel Mrs Conroy?”

With great effort she managed to part her eyelids and found herself looking into a turbaned head sitting on a green-gowned body. After several attempts to move a reluctant tongue she managed to nod.

“Feeling drowsy, hmmm? Well, soon it will be all over. Once we get rid of that appendix you’ll feel a different woman and you’ll have no more of these attacks.”

They wheeled her through shiny steel doors and lifted her relaxed body onto the hard sterile table with its big-eyed lights staring over her. An anaesthetist tied a thin tubing tightly above her elbow and she remembered no more

Later, much later, she opened her eyes, then gently closed them. I don’t feel too bad, she thought and opened her eyes again, wider this time. “I feel pretty good, in fact,” she murmured. “Dr. Jackson was right. I do feel a different woman.”

She sat up slowly to find herself alone. Not another soul was in sight and apart from her bed there was not even another stick of furniture. The room seemed full of mist and she shivered and gingerly bent forward looking for a blanket. But she found none, not even a sheet.

“My God,” she thought, “why don’t they close some of these windows? It’s enough to give a person pneumonia”. She strained around in search of a bell cord, but didn’t seem to have that either.

“Where in the name of Heaven have they put me,” she mused. “I’ve never seen a recovery room the like of this before.

“Is anyone there?” Her voice echoed hollowly in the vast room.

“Hullo Mrs Conroy. We’ve been expecting you.”

She swung her head quickly to see an aged benevolent-looking man materialise out of the mist that was still swirling about. Following on his heels were two others garbed in similar long robes, but for the life of her she couldn’t decide on their sex. “It’s so hard these days,” she thought, “when their hair is long.”

“Recognise me Mrs Conroy?”

“Well,” she thought, “he looks a bit like Father Time, but of course he’s not. He hasn’t got a scythe for one thing.

“Stop wool-gathering Helen,” she chided as she steadied herself on the side of the bed. “I’m still weak. I have this sensation of floating. I guess I’m light-headed.

“No, I’m sorry,” she said, “I really can’t place you. I feel I should, but there it is, you have the better of me.”

“I’m St Peter, Mrs Conroy. This is Arch Angel Gabriel and this our Recording Angel!”

Her mouth dropped in astonishment and he smiled kindly. “You’ll soon adjust Mrs Conroy. People always do, you know.”

“My God,” she thought, “I must be dead. Really and truly dead. If I am I must be in limbo or something. Old Jackson must have fluffed the operation, else how did I get here? He said I’d feel a different woman, but this is going a bit far. Well, they reckon doctors always bury their mistakes and it looks as though I’m living, or dead, proof of it — whatever I’m called here.”

She looked down at the theatre gown. “Well, at least they might have put me in a decent nightgown before they shipped me out. I must look damned ridiculous in this thing, no shoes and not a bit of make-up.” She gave a soft giggle at such strange thoughts.

“Come, Mrs Conroy. This is a serious business and not to be taken lightly. We’ll start proceedings as soon as

we’re all present.”

“Proceedings?” She looked in bewilderment from one to the other. “What do you mean? Just what is this?”

“You are here to be judged Mrs Conroy.”

“Look, I can’t stay here. It’s been a good joke but I’ve got to get back into bed. Visitors will be here soon and Brian will be in to see me

“I’m sorry Mrs Conroy. This is no joke. You’ve seen the last of your family for quite some time, I’m afraid.”

Tears began to trickle down her cheeks as the reality of the situation came home to her. Not to see Brian, her two daughters, her little grandchildren! How could she bear it?

Brian! How would he cope? He was next to useless in the house. “Oh,” she thought, “he’ll have that carpet ruined in no time wearing his yard shoes inside. And the washing! He’ll have his socks in with the whites. It will be everything in together. And he burns everything he cooks.

“And poor old Mum! How will she stand up to this shock? She’s too old for these sort of knocks. I hope the girls will be good to her. There’s all that sewing unfinished too.” Her thoughts were leap-frogging from one thing to another.

“Don’t worry Mrs Conroy,” St Peter said, as if reading her thoughts. “Things have a great way of sorting themselves out down there you know. And earthly matters are no longer your concern.”

At that moment a cloud of steam erupted into the room. When it cleared there stood a black-eyed villain if ever she’d seen one, dressed all in red, his long cloak billowing like a ship in full sail.

“About time Nick,” St Peter said. “We’ve been waiting some time.”



“Had a busy day. Came as soon as I could. Let’s get on with it. I’ve a lot to do down there you know.”

“We’ll make a start then. Now Mrs Conroy, your deeds and misdeeds are to be recounted and a judgement made of your earthly life. It will then be decided whether you are to join us up yonder or accompany Old Nick to the lower regions, if you know what I mean.

“It’s a court of a kind, but one that knows no appeal. Gabriel here will read your faults and misdeeds and the Recording Angel will list what are considered to be your virtues and the good you have done while in your earthly form.

“Now, for the record, you are Helen Louise Conroy, 48, late of Bridgeville, surviving family, husband Brian, 51, two daughters aged 24 and 27, three grandchildren, five, three and two, aged mother, 78. Right Angel, make a start.”

“She was good as a child,” Angel began. “Obedient, loving and respectful to her parents, giving them no cause for worry or upset. She was a happy little girl, unselfish with her playmates and always kind to birds and animals. Her youth was very much the same.”

“She used to back-answer her mother

and argue with her father,” Gabriel interrupted.

“But all kids do that,”

Helen replied.

“You keep out of this,” Nick said in a smouldering tone.

“She’s bossy,” Gabriel said.

“She’s a good organiser, working tirelessly for functions raising money for worthy charities.” This from

Angel.

“She has too much to say,” rejoined Gabriel.

“She has spirit,” Angel said. “She always spoke up for what was right and was never afraid to be counted even when all were against her.”

“She nagged her husband,” Gabriel said.

Angel didn’t look up.

“Did you?” St Peter asked.

“Yes,” replied Helen in a small apprehensive voice.

Old Nick beamed warmly. “A woman after my own heart”

“She’s honest,” Angel said. She didn’t deny it. “She truly was a good wife, loving and helping her husband in

every way. For the record, he really did need a bit of a prod at times.”

“She was vain and extravagant. Always doing herself up.”

“Very good, very good,” Nick said. “You’re doing well Gabe, my boy.”

“But you can’t deny she had pride in herself, her home and family,” Angel defended. “She did as much for them as for herself. She was kind and never mean with others and gave generously to those less fortunate than herself.”

“Here’s a good one for Nick,” Gabriel said. “She used bad language at fellow motorists, sometimes at pedestrians and often on the golf course.”

“But everyone does that at times,” Helen burst out.

“Really, Mrs Conroy,” St Peter said, “you must stay silent.”

“Never yet met a woman who could,” Old Nick muttered.

“Ah yes,” Angel said, “but she always had a comforting word for those in trouble and gave encouragement or praise when it was most needed. She was never known to be impatient, intolerant or ill-tempered.”

“She told falsehoods,” Gabriel yelled.

“I did no such thing,” Helen exclaimed.

“Oh yes you did, it’s in the book,” Gabriel said.

“Now look here.Helen argued.

“Quiet woman,” Old Nick roared, while St Peter raised his head from his writing and looked inquiringly at Angel.

“Well, they’re not black falsehoods,” Angel said. “Just what are known down there as white lies. She has never knowingly hurt another’s feelings, often turned the other cheek rather than cause unpleasantness. The white lies were mostly told out of consideration for others so I don’t

LESSONS ARE FOR LEARNING

Lillian Archer
Tumut VIEW Club

think we should hold those against her." She smiled encouragingly at Helen who relaxed a little.

"She's dishonest according to this book," Gabriel read.

Helen reared as if a bee had stung her in a very sensitive place. "I most certainly am not. That's not right and you know it," she said in desperation.

"It's on record in this book that you found a sum of money in a small purse and kept same."

"But I couldn't find the owner

"Don't make excuses woman," Old Nick thundered. "No person in their right mind would want to return it anyway."

"You mind your business," Helen snapped.

"Really, Mrs Conroy, I must ask you again....."

"But it's not fair," Helen said. "All these little things....."

"Ah yes, all these little things," St Peter said. "But they all add up, they all add up."

"She didn't attend the House of the Lord," triumphed Gabriel. Nick looked as though they had delivered the coup de grace.

Helen looked in trepidation at St Peter whose eyebrows were making question marks above the two wide eyes. "Tch, tch, tch, most deplorable Mrs Conroy."

Helen's eyes swung imploringly to Angel who looked up from her record. "Maybe so," she said, "but none can deny that she was Christian at heart. She helped others, was kind in deed and word, brought up her family to know their God. Although she may not have gone to church, she has done more good in her life than some who attend every Sunday."

Helen let a sigh of temporary relief

escape as she relaxed once more.

St Peter sat waiting for Gabriel to resume and raised his eyes to see him closing his book. "Are you finished?" he asked.

"Surely you can come up with something better than that?" implored Old Nick.

"No, that's the lot."

"Have you anything else to say Angel?" St Peter inquired.

"Helen Conroy was a good living woman, a devoted wife, a dedicated mother who was fair-minded with her children, bringing them up to be as



high principled as herself. She was a loving daughter, a loyal friend, a happy, contented, warm-hearted person who could always find a smile for others in her own trouble.

"She could usually find something good to say of others and if she couldn't, she never said anything bad.

She loved and was beloved by her fellow men. All in all, I think we would all welcome her up with us."

"How about that Nick?"

Looks as though you've lost this one ..."

"Don't win too many, thanks to you," Nick said and took off in a huff with a swirl of his red cloak. The last Helen saw of him was the tip of his tail as he disappeared in a cloud of mist.

"Cantankerous fellow," St Peter said,

"and a bad loser into the bargain. But he'll get over it and will be back in time for the next one. He doesn't win many though. We can usually find so much good in the worst of you that he's getting a bit understaffed down there.

"Well, come along. Angel here will find you something to wear. That outfit of yours is hardly suitable for our surroundings.

"Now don't fret, you'll soon settle in and you'll find lots of faces you know. It will be a bit strange at first, but people adjust to new situations very quickly up here.

It's all just a bit different at first."

"It surely is," Helen murmured. "It surely is

"Helen! Helen!"

"It surely is, it surely ..."

"Helen, can you hear me?"

"It ... " Slowly she opened her eyes"..... surely Brian!"

"Helen, are you alright?"

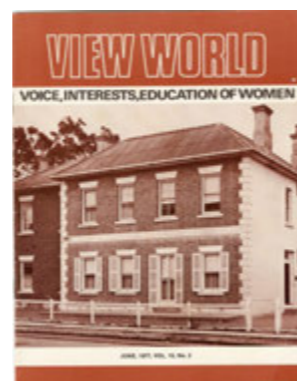
"Oh, I feel so ..."

"Yes I know. You're still a bit groggy I guess. Sister said you'd been awake but had dropped off to sleep again."

"Brian, I had the strangest dream....."

"Rest now. You'll be OK. Dr Jackson said you'll be a different woman."

"Oh, I was, I was! Heaven only knows, I was."



It's a stimulating contrast," Mary suggested.

But Jane was adamant. "It's a hair shirt, and you're not the one who should be wearing it. Selling the Big House yes, but not just to pay Bert's debts. You should have gone abroad to live it up for a while. Or to live it down, if you like. You could have come back afterwards and settled again."

"I have settled," Mary said. "In this poky little house, with these uncarpeted floors and a roof so low it's like living under a hairdryer? I don't believe it."

Mary began to clear away the tea things. "It covers me," she said, "And my shame." "Well frankly, it doesn't cover mine, Mary. I hate the thought of anyone seeing my car outside. And really, the sound of all those dogs would drive me dilly. I can't understand why you wanted to replace dear little Cindy with that mob of strays. You might as well have applied for the position of keeper of the local pound."

Mary was standing at the open door looking out at the mob of strays, "I loved Cindy," she said, "and these dogs love me. Doesn't that make sense?"

"Sense!" Jane shrieked. "None of what's happened makes sense, this

ménage least of all. But if you will live this way, for glory sake don't let yourself go."

Mary flung the tea leaves out on to the bare earth. "Go where?"

Her quiet acceptance of an unbelievable situation angered Jane. "You know what I mean," she snapped.

Mary smiled. "Yes, of course, but it seems I've gone already. It doesn't matter about coming again Jane. I understand."

"Which is more than I do," Jane clattered along the hall towards the door, needing nothing more to confirm her suspicions that Mary's worries had left her mind as unhinged as her front gate.

It was not so much a need for isolation as a revulsion for pity that had made Mary Ellerton, in her middle years, choose to live alone on the outskirts of the small town where she had always been held in high regard.

Her husband, too, had been held in high regard, until it was discovered that he had backed out, owing large sums of money and leaving at least one of the clubs doubtful of the reliability of its poker machines.

As well, perhaps more as a gesture of defiance than anything else, he had taken with him the wife of one of the district's most industrious farmers — a man too industrious, some said, to notice whether his wife was there or not.

It was suggested that Bert Ellerton had gone astray because of Mary's love of fine clothes and lavish entertaining. This, however, did not explain his annexation of Mrs Dibbs.

Certain of Mary's friends said that Mrs Dibbs had been Bert's main trouble ever since her husband's industry had lifted them into a position that insured their inclusion on the Big House guest list.

Mary had noticed nothing until her little dog, Cindy, had been run over as Bert backed his car out of the garage. Her grief and his in-difference and accusation of inflated social ambitions had jolted her.

"You just don't know what goes," Bert had told her.

"Obviously," she had said, not realising that he and Mrs Dibbs were going, leaving her with the backlash of his fiscal, and no doubt physical,



indiscretions; and leaving Mr Dibbs with nothing but his daily routine.

"All you're interested in are those gorge and gabble parties," Bert had said. "And dogs of course."

"I see," she said, seeing nothing but his crooked tie and Cindy dead at her feet.

Now it was behind her, even Bert's ebullience having distanced with time. Nothing was left but the realisation that her life with him had been so full that it was empty.

Mary's interest in dogs had not flagged, it had grown. Like many absorbing interests it had spread to include a number of things of which she had never before been aware and so had never enjoyed. If she was not rapturously happy, she was content. With some cynicism, she had accepted what many people so glibly declare, that life is what you make it.

From the rescue and care of stray dogs, she had moved into the breeding and training of sheep dogs and, after a time, the people of the town came to accept or ignore "the dog woman" as she was sometimes called. But in the country there is nothing like a rumour that a dog is "after sheep" to recreate an interest in the dog's owner.

The rumour filtered through to Mary who dismissed it until it widened to include Mr Dibbs' sheep. The loss of his wife had left him unscarred but the loss of his sheep was another matter.

When this threatened he complained, with some personal malice, to Mary.

"There are no strays left in the district. It must be your dogs. They're close enough. And wild enough, — some of them. They're not all pure breeds."

"I'll watch them," Mary said warily. "But they do need exercise and sometimes take it."

"Not in my direction any more Mrs Erer," said Mr Dibbs as he left; and Mary knew it was an ultimatum.

Realising the seriousness of the situation, she gave time and thought to the problem of a dog's addiction to sheep and a sheep's value to man. On horseback, or walking, she went with her dogs and their responses to her whistle, her call or the crack of a whip were prompt enough.

None of them showed any inclination to stray. But a dog who has tasted the delights of harrying sheep becomes cunning. He will go to any lengths, and any distance, to extend his pleasure. And if he joins a pack there will be trouble, big trouble.

Although there was no proof as yet, Mary reluctantly suspected one particular dog. He was not a mongrel and she thought he would never be false to his breed.

In spite of her care and concern, the trouble continued and on his next visit Mr Dibbs was even less polite. In fact, things looked like developing into a kind of old fashioned feud and Mary wondered, sardonically, if Mr Dibbs

might prove to be a one or two gun man.

Late one afternoon she decided on an unconventional check on Scrap, her finest Kelpie. With the shadows beginning to lean down the long, green slopes she took him walking; successfully holding him to the leash until they reached the closest of Mr Dibbs' paddocks — the home paddock. There she let him go, opened the gate and hesitated, looking at a mob of jostling apprehensive sheep, trying to make up their minds whether to go or stay.

As Scrap raced towards the sheep she, too, began to run. But as the sheep, the dog and Mary became shadowed by the trees, a shot rang out from the direction of the house.

With a shallow but profusely bleeding wound in the arm, Mary fell fainting to the ground. Scrap left the sheep for another day (or night) and came to her, standing guard and challenging Mr Dibbs who came running down the hill.

It was all very unfortunate, but the accident did mean that a decision whether to destroy or exonerate the dog would be deferred.

In the meantime, vegetables, fruit and apologies flowed from the farm to "the dog house". Mr Dibbs delivered the apologies himself and as his visits became more frequent; his manner towards Mary became a cross between a stern parent and an

amiable suitor.

Although moved to a sympathetic understanding of the industrious farmer, Mary realised that her feelings were tainted with a desire to save Scrap. She knew she must avoid the proposal that seemed imminent.

Day after day passed with not one helpful idea developing; but in a dilemma that was sometimes irritating, sometimes amusing, Mary knew when the time was propitious — for Mr Dibbs.

As he sat warming his angular knees by the fire, she studied his long, lugubrious face, realising that only a sudden and superb inspiration could help her. Oh how she wished she had the courage to slap him on the back and say "Oh, buck up. Either way, it won't be anything a good day's work won't cure."

Instead, she waited quietly while he nervously blew his nose and began pacing the small room, bobbing frequently to miss the low-hung beams.

"Good rain we've had," he said, stopping at last.

Mary added silently, "Grass growing; sheep doing well, can't afford to lose any, though; can't let her bring that kelpie with her."

But no, he said, "I know a fella who would take Scrap. Good fella. Good dog. Says he can cure them. Bad habit worrying sheep. Know where it ends, don't you?"

"Yes," Mary said briskly and throwing all the old rules of etiquette overboard added, "You'll have a cup of tea before you go, won't you? Tea or coffee?" At all costs she must get him going ahead of his mind.

"I'd like a cup of tea." He sat down and with dismay she watched his face relax and a timid smile lift the corners

of his mouth.

"Oh no," she thought. "That's not fair. You've got to play the game as you've always played it."

"Yes, thank you," he repeated, "I would like a cup of tea. But I'm not going yet. Not until I've persuaded you to come and live with me."

"Persuaded," he had said, then, he hadn't expected it to be easy.

He leaned forward. "You know what I mean?"

It had been a long time since Mary had blushed but as she looked down at her drab frock and the soiled apron she had forgotten to remove, she felt the blood throbbing in her head.

She must be firm, for both of them, but she mustn't be unkind. She mustn't say, "The more I see of men the better I like ..." Oh no, not that.

"No Mr Dibbs," she said. "I don't know what you mean. Are you asking me to live with you — in sin? You are a married man, you know."

"Ah, well yes, that's it. But it can be got over I expect."

"Yes," Mary granted him. "A lot of things can, and must be, got over, but some of the hurdles are higher than they look. Where is Mrs Dibbs do you know?"

"No," he said firmly, adding the seemingly irrelevant rider, "She was a good cook."

Mary was relieved. "Oh was she? I'm a bad one, very bad. We always employed a cook. Bert insisted."

Mr Dibbs was not deterred. "You could take lessons. You could learn."

It was then she got the hoped-for inspiration. "Yes," she said brightly. "Lessons are for learning, aren't they?" Putting her hand into the apron pocket, she crushed and crackled and envelope and its contents, hesitating

only a moment. After all, her life as Bert's wife and the town's most successful hostess has been pitted with socially acceptable lies, or at least necessary prevarications.

"I think Bert would like to come back," she said a little too smugly.

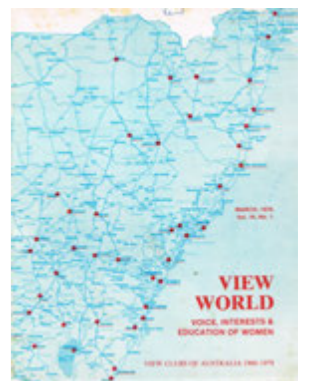
Mr Dibbs stood up quickly. "Oh I see. You've got your mail then. I missed out on mine. I'll have to pick it up tomorrow."

Forgetting about the tea, he shook hands very solemnly, gripping her hand as if this was the last time he would ever see her.

With some regret, for him as well as for herself and Scrap, Mary saw him go. Reaching into her pocket, she took out an almost forgotten account. "I'd better pay this tomorrow," she told herself, tossing the envelope into the fire.

Watching it flare quickly and curl into black ashes, she reviewed her dismissal of the industrious farmer and knew it to be right.

"Of course lessons are for learning," she conceded. "I've learned mine and it's time Mr Dibbs learned his, even if we don't get the same answers."



His & Hers

New Lambton VIEW Club
2nd Prize Short Story Competition

His

"Thank you Verger".

Well, what have we here? Specially printed service cards, if you please, silver cupids and entwined hearts! What next! Quite well done, I must say, though it's not something I would have had myself. I suppose that brother of hers who is a printer did them for her.

"Groom's parents, Verger". "Come along John, we might as well go in".

What a long aisle, I hope she doesn't have trouble with her frock. I remember how mine kept catching on the carpet. Still, these days they seem to wear them an inch or two up from the floor in the front. Eliminates one problem at least, and heaven knows there are plenty with every wedding.

The church is very full, more on their side than ours, of course. "I must ask you to restrict your list to fifty" she said. I just hope she has done the same, there seem to be a lot of people in wedding outfits on the left-hand side. There's that terrible old uncle of theirs who positively ruined the engagement party, fancy inviting him after that performance!

Here we are, I'm going to kneel, though I know they usually don't in Presbyterian churches.

"Dear God, give Thy blessing to my

son and his bride. Grant them much happiness, and strength to share their joys and sorrows through the years. Amen".

So Five minutes to three. I do hope she doesn't belong to the "lucky to be late" school.

I've always thought how nerve-racking that must be to the bridegroom. Not to mention the minister, trying to keep up a conversation in the vestry. Still, after sitting through that interminable sermon this man gave when we came to hear the banns read, I don't imagine he'd have any trouble with a mere ten minutes or so.

I wish John would unfold his arms and stop gazing out of the side window. Shall I nudge him? No, leave him be. I wonder if he is feeling as nostalgic as I am. The first wedding in the family, our first-born. Probably more likely to be worrying how the Under 15s are getting on without him shouting on the sideline. This will be the first Saturday for years that he hasn't been with them.

Patricia Stevenson

I really find this all hard to believe. Our Robert actually about to be married. Twenty- three years old, where has the time gone? What with him being three weeks late, and me two days in labour, I thought he'd never get born and yet these twenty-three years have passed and it doesn't seem a minute. What a terrible time that was, when he was being born. I was so young, and completely ignorant, and it just went on and on and on. I remember that little nurse who came on duty on the

second day and said brightly: "Do you want a boy or a girl, Mrs. Mathieson?" And the shocked look on her face when I cried: "I don't give a damn if it's a Siamese cat, just let it be born!"

Ah, well, he arrived at last and we were so happy, and called him Robert, with a solemn vow never to shorten it to "Bob". So what happened? He got "Robbie" all his life. But it always suited him, and anyway it was a lot better than the ghastly nicknames of some of his friends. That poor Nightingale boy they called "Florence", or "Bull" Ferrier. I wonder where those boys are now.

Here is her mother arriving. I don't think I would have chosen yellow roses with a blue suit, but she looks quite charming. It must be an ordeal losing your only child, she looks quite flustered. Not to mention having all the responsibility of the reception on your shoulders. That's one consolation with having three boys, the expenses are much less. Not but what I would have given anything for a daughter. The boys have been wonderful, but I would have loved a little girl, "A son's a son, etc. etc." Well we'll see. Judith is a dear thing, surely she won't want Robbie to cut himself off from his family altogether. But remember how those women in the hospital when Gavin was born made my blood run cold with the way they talked about their mothers-in-law? "I've just had my third son", I told them, "I'll be a mother-in-law myself one day. You all seem to begrudge your husbands visiting their mothers, I'd hate to think my boys' wives would feel like that". But

they were all alike, I just hope Judy takes a more tolerant attitude. I never had the problem myself with John's mother dying before I met him.

Three o'clock, I wish she'd come. Ah, yes, there's a stir at the back, and here comes the minister, with the boys behind him.

How tall and good-looking they all are, my three sons. Martin looks a bit uneasy, after all the ragging he has received about best men who lose the ring, he's probably wondering if he's been jinxed. Gavin, naturally, is completely unconcerned. I've never known such an uncomplicated nature. Nervousness is a word Gavin doesn't even know.

And Robert. So serious, even stern, if you didn't know him as I do. He always was a solemn little boy. His kindergarten teacher used to put a mark on the blackboard if she caught him smiling. Oh, and that's what he has just done, a quick smile for me. Thank you dear.

There's the bridal march.

"Stand up John".

Now I can turn round. Why, the church is completely full, how nice. There's one, two, three, there must be about half- a-dozen neighbours come to watch, that really is good of them, when I felt embarrassed at not being able to invite them all.

Here come the bridesmaids. Two of her cousins, the one in front is very pretty indeed. What a delicate shade of apricot, it suits them both.

And here she is. Ah, yes, very, very lovely. She really is a sweet and beautiful girl, and I know she will make Robert a good wife

God bless them both.

Hers

Thank you, Mr. Cuthbertson". Dear me, he is really getting quite shaky, he must be very old, he's been the verger here as long as I can remember.

How "nice the cards look. I'm glad we had them done, although you would think my own brother would have given them as a gift, instead of charging a small fortune. "Special discount" indeed, if I know Charlie he probably added 10% to his usual price.

Still, they do add that little something to the day. Besides, I wouldn't want Robert's people to think we couldn't afford to have any extras.

I do wish I didn't have to walk down this long aisle on my own. At least the groom's mother has her husband with her. Oh dear, Charlie and his wife are coming with me, and I just know they will put themselves in the front pew.

The church is crowded, I never dreamed there would be so many people here. More on our side I'm pleased to see. Actually, when you come to think of it, this business of bride's family one side and groom's the other is ridiculous. Makes me feel that at any moment a gong will sound and a voice say "seconds out". Stop being so fanciful Emily, and sit yourself down.

A little prayer. "Please God look after my child and let her have as happy a marriage as I have had".

My, how stylish Mrs. Mathieson looks. Beige ensemble and brown accessories, very smart. But then she always dresses well. His father looks pre-occupied. If he had to pay for all this like poor Arthur has, he might well look even more thoughtful.

There, I knew Charlie and Moira would sit with me. Just like their impertinence. Never see each other for years on end, charge me the earth for the cards, and then install themselves in the front pew. Really, I could scream with exasperation.

I've got a horrible feeling too that I saw Uncle Fred sitting up near the back. I daren't look- around, I do hope I imagined it. Why is it that every family has an Uncle Fred? He only got a courtesy invitation because he is Arthur's uncle, and he didn't even acknowledge it, but it would be just like him to come anyway.

Come, come, Emily, pull yourself together. Are you going to spoil your only child's wedding by letting these little things upset you? Whoever heard of a wedding where something didn't go wrong? Exactly, now just calm down. Think of all the times the two of you have planned this, ever since Judy was a little girl, she loved to make-believe her wedding, and now it is here, so what do a few tiresome relations mean on your girl's wedding day?

Quite right. I'm being silly. I'll take a few deep breaths, and try to relax.

The flowers are a picture, There's no doubt about Beverley, she has green fingers. I'm glad Judith asked her to be chief bridesmaid. They have always been such close friends, and one doesn't lose sight of cousins as one is apt to do of girlhood friends. Jennifer too, although Judith hasn't been as close

to her as to Beverley. Still, it doesn't do to create jealousy between sisters, and that might have happened if she had only asked Bev. Judy has always missed not having a sister, but sometimes life is less troublesome without a lot of relatives (well, take Charlie, for example, I could do without him).

The vestry door is opening and here comes the minister. Dear Mr. Lloyd, he baptised Judith, and married Arthur and me (not in that order, of course), and now here he is, officiating at Judith's marriage. And he hardly looks any different. A few more lines, perhaps, and greyer hair, but that's all. Such a good man, what does it matter if he's a little long-winded?

Here comes Robert, and his brothers. Three boys, mercy me, I hope it isn't hereditary, I'm sure Judy couldn't cope with, three great strapping sons like these. What am I thinking about? Not even married and I've got her tied down with, babies. Perish the thought, how lowering to be a grandmother!

Robbie is very good-looking, there's no doubt about it. I remember when she first brought him home, I was sure it wouldn't last, that she was just infatuated by his looks. But underneath he is a very serious young man, a two firm feet on the ground type, I don't think I have anything to worry about there.

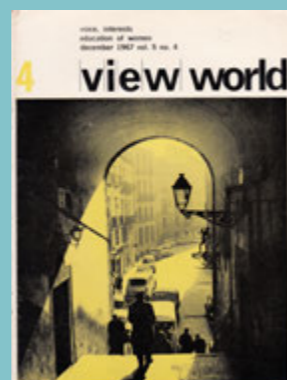
Oh dear, the bridal march. I feel so fluttery. I'll just hold the back of the seat as I stand up, it will stop my hand from shaking.

That's right, Charlie, drop your prayer book at the crucial moment.

Here come the girls. Doesn't Beverly look wonderful? That apricot sets off her dark hair to perfection, Jennifer, too, although she seems to be terribly nervous.

And now, here is Arthur —and— Judith.

"My baby, oh, my beautiful baby.



WOMEN'S VIEW Winter 1999

LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN

Dorothy Shumack

Speers Point VIEW Club
Equal 2nd VIEW Literary Award

"First gate on the right after the Taroola turn-off", muttered Sally as her old Ford jolted along the rutted dirt track. The black plains of the north-west stretched parched and dusty, but the trees were green – scrubby Wattles and native pines, drooping casuarinas and a variety of eucalypts. stuck with us women teachers

She negotiated the rough 'cocky's gate' and drove through mobs of sheep and cattle towards the red roof of the homestead in the distance. The sun appeared to be hovering on the horizon, suffusing the sky with crimson. Crows cawed overhead and pink and grey galahs rose in screeching clouds from the dry grass.

A chorus of barking dogs announced her arrival. "What they thinking of, sending another young girl?" was the farmer's greeting as, small and slight, she slid out from behind the wheel. Mrs Wilkins quickly intervened. "Welcome, Mrs Stewart. We're so pleased to have a teacher at last. Come in. You must be tired after your long drive."

Joe Wilkins proved to be blunt but kindly, his wife Bessie plump and motherly. Joe was determined to 'speak his mind'. "It's just too big a job for a young girl. The last lass — nice little thing she was — she couldn't handle it. Had a nervous breakdown in the end." Sally's eyes danced. "I'm afraid you're stuck with us women teachers until after the war, Mr. Wilkins. But don't worry," she smiled reassuringly. "I've had five years' experience. I'm really good at my job."

The Wilkins were delighted that Sally was a country girl, willing and able to drive their two to school in horse and sulky. Sally was delighted to save her precious petrol coupons.

Next morning, as the pony, Gundy, pulled them the four miles to school, Cathy, pigtailed and eight years, sat

quiet and shy, but ten-year-old Ben was a willing guide and informant.

At first sight her heart sank. Such a forlorn little building it was in such a bare playground, two iron tanks at one end giant red gum at the other. A clump of ironbarks provided shade in the fenced-off paddock. Two toilets stood starkly at the back; dusty silver dusty silver bush straggled along the front - fence.

As they drove up a man stepped forward from a small group. "I'm Bob Smith and these are my youngsters. I've brought the snake sticks." Sally's eyes widened in dismay as he continued. "I put one at each corner and one at each toilet. You ever killed a snake?" "N-no, but I've - watched my father," she stammered. "You'll be OK. Just keep beside him." He touched his hat. "I'll unharness the horse for you - then I'll be off."

When she rang the old brass bell twelve children ran into line, some barefoot and scruffy, a few well dressed, all eager and expectant. Sally had only taught in staffed schools. Suddenly she felt overwhelmed that she was solely responsible for the schooling of these bush children.

It was an exciting first week - a time of getting-to-know-you, of class organisation, of work planning. She was startled when Mary Thomas, wise beyond her years, asked what the whole- small community wanted to know.

"Mrs Stewart, where is Mr. Stewart?" Eyes bright with unshed tears but in a steady voice she told the suddenly hushed room: "He was a pilot in the Air Force. He went away overseas — and he won't come back." "Was his plane shot down? Did he bail out in a parachute?" from Ben. "Yes, but it was over the sea and by the time the boat found him he'd drowned." She felt Mary's warm little hand in hers. "My Mum's sad too. My big brother was

killed at Tobruk."

Don't grieve for me, Sal, if I don't come back,"

.... "We've had our little bit of heaven."

Sally realised almost guiltily that she'd hardly thought of Wally all week. They'd grown up on neighbouring farms and had married just a week before he sailed away. "Don't grieve for me, Sal, if I don't come back," he'd said as he waved her good-bye. "We've had our little bit of heaven." She did grieve - she was shattered - when the dreaded telegram came two years ago. He'd been there all her life and she missed him sorely. She was angry and bitter that his life, and so many other vital young lives, had been terminated so cruelly. Now, though she knew she'd never forget him, she realised that the challenge of the last weeks was gently erasing the pain.

Friday night's dinner was relaxed. "Why were you so worried?" she asked Joe. "These children are a delight." "Just wait, girlie, till the McVains come. I hear that Nick, their Dad, that is, thought he'd give you a week to settle in first. They've been wild since their mother died when the last little one was born. The oldest - she must be about 18 now - tries hard but she doesn't have a hope."

Sure enough Monday morning brought five young McVains into her life. A tall rangy man dismounted from a big black horse as Sally arrived at school and held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mrs Stewart' I'm Nick McVain." He appraised her swiftly with searching blue eyes.

"I'd rather hoped they'd send someone a bit, well, older." "Sorry to disappoint you, Mr. McVain, but I assure you I'm a very capable teacher," Sally flared. "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to offend you." He



was floundering, embarrassed. "You see that circus coming up the road is my children. They're quite a handful"

Thundering towards them came a large, half-draught horse drawing a spring cart, children hanging over the sides. Without slackening speed it raced through the gate and came to an abrupt stop at the horse paddock. "I've told them to keep inside the cart. You see why I worry," he said with a rueful grin. "Well, let me know if you have too much trouble."

They were a challenge. Little Johnny, just starting, clung to his sisters and refused to speak. It was Mary Thomas who eventually won his trust and eased him gently into school life. The twins, Margaret and Lucy, wary and defiant at first, responded to Sally's loving firmness and became her devoted slaves. They need their mother, she thought.

Colin, eleven years, prickly and argumentive, was very bright with an insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge. Kept busy and interested, he gave little trouble.

But Jim, the oldest, tall and awkward, was inattentive, unruly and disruptive. Sally tried every strategy she knew but at last in desperation she rang his father. "Mrs Stewart, I'm so sorry." She appreciated that he didn't say: "I told you so...." "I could do with

his help here at home, but, you see, next year he should join his brother at boarding school. With no teacher there last term he couldn't do the entrance exam." "But," protested Sally, "I can't help him if he won't listen to me." "Please give him another chance. I'll speak to him." He was pleading. "By the way, you've certainly won over the others." Next day Jim was quiet and withdrawn. "Dad gave him a walloping," volunteered Colin. Jim remained sullen. The little school hummed with activity and achievement, but Sally ached for the misery in the boy's eyes.

Then one day: "Snake!" screamed young Jack from near the toilet. Sally feared and loathed snakes and had hoped this occasion would never arise. But with a brisk "Stay inside everyone" she went out to investigate. Jack, trained as bush children are to keep your eye on him, was quietly tracking the slithering big brown. Sally realised that Jim was beside her, carrying the snake stick that she'd forgotten. "Just stand back, Mrs Stewart," he said softly.

Two sharp whacks and the gleaming reptile writhed convulsively, twitched and was still. As Jim casually draped it over the fence he muttered: "My Mum didn't much like snakes either." She smiled at him through tears; he grinned back tentatively. The school gave him three cheers and Sally knew

that at last she could begin to win his trust and cooperation.

Autumn brought drenching rain and muddy, boggy roads and greening paddocks and hope on weather-beaten faces. "Could be the start of a good season, a-one-in-five chance," she was told.

Winter came with frosty mornings and fathers rostered to cut firewood. Nick often appeared, a self-appointed 'Mr. Fix-it'. Sally suspected he was keeping check on Jim. He helped her and the children plan and plant a garden, a plot for each child. He cleaned out the tanks. He rejoiced with her when the school yearly inspection brought her a top teaching mark. "Well deserved," he said.

Then the wheat paddocks turned golden and the harvesters toiled from daylight till dark. But they all came to the break-up concert at the end of the term. The stage was the school verandah, the curtain was sewn from discarded wheat bags. The audience sat out in front in the assembly area. The curtain opened and the sweet young voices lifted up in song, drifted out into the starry summer night. Then came drama, dance and music. Santa distributed presents from the tree. Sally looked for Nick to share her pride in the performances of the children. But he approached

her formally, shook her hand and "Goodbye, Sally, have a good holiday," was all he said. The children followed him unwillingly to the car and they were gone.

Home with her parents, Sally couldn't hide her dejection. Her mother was anxious. "Sal, what's happened? You were so on top of the world last holidays!" So she told her mother how she'd grown to love Nick and how he'd rebuffed her. Her mother said: "But my dear, even if he does care for you, and I'm sure he must, with all those children he'd never believe anyone would want to share his life." She put an arm around her daughter's drooping shoulders. "Sally, you must be very, very sure you understand how you feel about the whole situation."

The holidays seemed to drag but eventually the Wilkins welcomed her back with the news: "It'll be easier for you this year. Nick's sending his kids to Taroola. Long way for kids on that train, I reckon."

She waited for two weeks and Nick hadn't contacted her, so she knew she must go to see him. Nick's grandfather had owned the original station before it had been cut up for closer settlement. Nick still lived in the old family homestead. There it lay before her, long and low, wide verandahs, a large unkempt garden, and small

forms at play.

They ran laughing to meet her when she drove in. She looked over their heads as Nick came out of the house. Suddenly she felt uneasy, wondering had she presumed too much. But the joy flooding his face dispelled her doubts. "Sally," he breathed, then was speechless. "I had to come, because you didn't", she said simply. "And Nick, I must know - why did you rush off after the Christmas concert? Why aren't the children back at school this year?" "Oh, Sally, my love, we are just so many and you are so young - I couldn't ask you to - to be part of this family. But then I couldn't bear to keep seeing you either."

She reached up to put a finger to his lips. "Hush. Nick. Age doesn't matter. I love your children like my own."

His arms enfolded her, the children thronged around them - and she knew that from somewhere Wally, watching, was pleased she'd found her second 'little bit of heaven'.



VIEW World June 1970

New Lambton VIEW Club
2nd Prize: Short Story Competition

The Sweetest Music

Mrs. P. Stevenson

Young Mrs. Brown lay awake for many hours on her wedding night, staring wide-eyed into the darkness, facing up to a fact of married life about which her mother had neglected to warn her.

Beside her, her bridegroom of a few hours slept contentedly. Slightly built, fair-haired, with a smile which had captured her heart on first meeting, cheerful, thoughtful, athletic, neat, the love of her life, and he snored!

Mrs. Brown listened, appalled, as the anvil chorus continued beside her. However would she sleep with that going on? Did he snore all the time, or periodically? Every night? Heaven forbid!

Why hadn't his mother said something? Was there a cure? Something about being on his back she had read somewhere, surely.

She tried cautiously to turn him on his side, but he only grunted and snuggled down further under the blankets. She didn't like to push too hard; after all, they hadn't been married very long (ten hours to be exact); it didn't seem polite to start shoving him around on their honeymoon.

Irritably she thought back over the hundreds of love stories she had read throughout her girlhood years. The vast majority of them ended shyly as the bedroom door closed on the bridal couple. Those that did feature wedding-night complications invariably had some romantic feature such as the husband dying of tuberculosis, or his heart being irretrievably buried in the grave of his long-dead childhood sweetheart. Nobody ever discovered that her dashing hero snored.

"Nobody but me," she whispered, catching her breath on a distinct sob.

The long night wore on and eventually she slept. In the morning, waking to the sight of his dear face smiling at her, the night-time worries seemed ridiculous.

"What does it matter," she thought, "the minister said 'for better or worse,' didn't he? It's a pretty small sort of 'worse.'"

So they spent a delightful honeymoon and, if Mrs. Brown didn't get much sleep, well, she was young and in love, and she found she could sneak a few naps in the sun on the beach each afternoon.

But honeymoons don't last forever, and all too soon they returned home, to a dear little cottage in an outer suburb. This meant a fair amount of travelling time for Mr. Brown to get to work, which in turn meant early rising. Mrs. Brown knew she would have to find some solution so she could get enough sleep to see her through the day.

She consulted her mother-in-law, who was no help at all. "Yes, isn't he terrible?" said this worthy. "But he never troubled me, I just closed his door, then my door, and I never heard him."

She consulted her own mother. "Well, darling, I believe you have to turn them

on their side, but your father never snored, so I really don't know much about it."

She consulted her doctor, who gave her a long involved discourse on the reasons why people snored, but no cure or magic potion, beyond the already suggested "turn him on his side".

She consulted her friends, his friends, her grandmother, his grandmother, medical books and women's magazines. She listened to old wives' tales and young wives' tales, and the only conclusion she came to was that if one more person told her to try turning him on his side she would scream.

However, honesty made her admit



to herself there was no doubt that the noise diminished when he was in such a position, the only trouble was getting him over and making him stay there.

There is a knack to this, as any wife will tell you, but it is not a talent with which women are born and it takes many years of trial and error to reach an expertise.

Each man needs a different technique, so Mrs. Brown set about her apprenticeship, resignedly—for she loved him dearly—but determinedly, for who needs sleep more than a young wife and mother?

Yes, after a year she was a young mother, delighting in the wonder of a small bundle that now took over the

household, albeit adding his mite to her restless nights with demanding calls for attention.

Mrs. Brown found she also had another problem, for the age-old custom of having the baby in a bassinet beside her bed was unworkable. Just as the baby dropped off to sleep, Mr. Brown started to snore. This woke the baby, who yelled, which woke Mr. Brown, who became sorely annoyed, and exchanged heated words with Mrs. Brown, who cried, which upset the baby, and no one slept.

So the baby went into his own room very early in his life. When he cried in the night, Mrs. Brown would slip soundlessly out of bed and into the other room, to feed him, or rock him, or walk the floor with him, all the time listening to the rhythmic rise and fall of Mr. Brown's midnight serenade.

"What wouldn't I give," she often asked herself, "for just one good night's sleep?" What wouldn't I give for one night without a single sound to disturb me? I'd give just anything, that's what!"

Sometimes as she crept, frozen, back into her own room and looked down at her snoring spouse, the impulse to break a vase over his unconscious head had to be forcibly restrained.

The years slipped by, as years have a habit of going, and two little sisters followed young Gary at nicely spaced intervals. Anne and Alison were both sound sleepers, and nothing teaches like experience. From the moment of their arrival home, Mrs. Brown tucked them safely into their own room and their father's snoring troubled them not at all.

By this time Mrs. Brown had acquired her knack. She found that with her shoulder strategically placed under his arm, and her knee quietly slipped under his derriere, she could turn him gently over from back to side without disturbing him. This latter was

essential for, if she woke him in the process, he either became irritable or amorous and, after ten years or more of marriage, who wants either at 3 a.m.? Thus positioned, she could prop herself up against him and they would both sleep soundly the whole night through.

Once she went to stay with her mother for a week as her father was ill. She soon received a frantic phone call from her elder daughter to come home and "do something about Daddy". Apparently he was enjoying her absence by spending the whole night on his back, and the resulting cacophony was rendering the night hideous for the teenage fraternity..

So she worked out an elaborate system of pillow arrangements and when he was ready for sleep, the children would make sure he was on his side, erect his barricade of pillows to keep him in the position until morning, and then retire hopefully, to their own rooms.

Surprisingly it worked, but Mr. Brown assured her on her return, that he much preferred her own sweet warm body to prop him up than a mountain of foam rubber. It's the little things that mean a lot in a woman's life, isn't it?

By the time Mr. Brown's fair hair had begun to thin a little, and his wife's had changed to a pretty grey, the children had married, and the house which seemed to bulge outwards with their vitality and constant stream of visiting friends, impromptu parties and dances, was suddenly smaller and lonelier.

With two empty rooms, they could, of course, have had separate rooms, but the thought never occurred to either of them. Mrs. Brown had learned to live with her problem, while Mr. Brown had never any problem at all, nothing disturbed his rest.

The married daughters came home often. They joked and laughed over their early-married difficulties, thanked heaven loudly and often that they hadn't married snorers, teased their father and consulted with their mother, and left their children as often as possible for the older couple to mind.

Son Gary brought his wife home, too, to boast, just a little, about her, their children, his job and his home. He, too, took liberal advantage of such ideal baby-sitters.

One morning, Mr. Brown set off as usual for work, but he never reached there. A white-faced neighbour ran into the house to tell his wife he had collapsed on the street corner, and by the time she reached him, he was dead.

All day long friends and relatives crowded the little home. The daughters and daughter-in-law made endless cups of tea, whilst the son and sons-in-law made stilted conversation. In the middle of it all sat Mrs. Brown, dry-eyed, still, divorced from everything and everyone around her in a state of frozen grief.

When night came everyone drifted back to their own homes. Only her daughters stayed. They offered to sleep with her but she would have none of them. They helped her undress and switched off the light and left her door just a little ajar. She heard the clinking of dishes, the subdued voices and quiet movement. Gradually all this faded away and she heard soft good nights, the lights switched off and all was still.

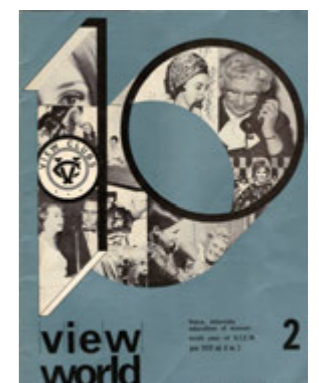
Old Mrs. Brown lay awake for many hours on the first night of her bereavement, staring wide-eyed into the darkness. No sound disturbed her, and out of the past she distinctly heard her own voice saying, "What wouldn't I give for just one good night's rest? What wouldn't I give for just one

night without a single sound to disturb me? I'd give just anything, that's what!"

She stirred suddenly and swung purposely round to face the emptiness beside her. As her hand moved towards the void, a phrase she had read years ago sprang into her mind.

"Snoring," some scribe had written, "is the sweetest music this side of heaven."

Widowed Mrs. Brown buried her face in the empty pillow and wept.



JAILBREAK IN SLEEPY HOLLOW

Miriam Medaris

Cronulla VIEW Club.

Neil and I had been married almost a year. Financially encumbered, we were without a phone or TV and I was five months pregnant.

That morning I had been too busy to switch on the transistor or even glance at the newspaper Neil had left before leaving for work in the truck. I was unaware there had been a jailbreak from the nearby security prison until later in the day while visiting my nearest neighbour about a quarter of a kilometre away.

At large were two convicted murderers — one a rapist — both armed and dangerous. Media warnings were being issued to the public.

"Val," I said, "I've a sinking feeling I forgot to lock our front bedroom window."

"Forget it, ducks. Nothing ever happens in this dump!"

Anyway, the cops'll pick 'em up f'sure. Hey, y'can stop f'lunch if y'like! Drop y'orf later in the ute. Kids 'n me gotta collect Jim uptown — goin' to Art's place f'tea."

"Thanks, Val. That'll be fine. Long as I'm home to get our evening meal."

We spent a happy day and I forgot about the escapees until 4.30 when Val dropped me and drove away.

Putting my key in the front door, I noticed it was ajar. With quickening pulse, I pushed it gently when something cold stuck in the back of my neck. I wheeled around and stared down the barrel of a sawn-off rifle! Next a huge hand covered my mouth!

"Git inside," mumbled a red-bearded man in filthy overalls.

"Shut up and do as y'told, or else!"

Or else what? I went hot, sick, then cold.

Viciously kicking the door shut, he snatched and pocketed my keys then, roughly piloting me into the kitchen, demanded "Gimme some 'ot tucker.

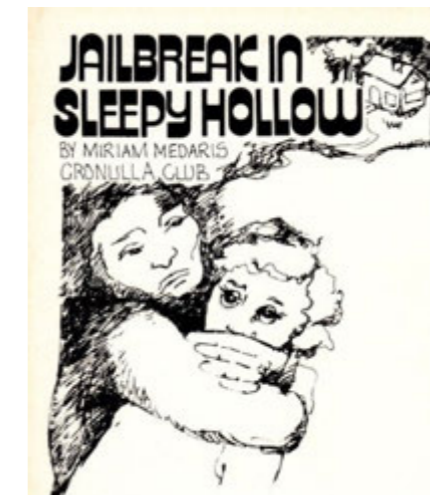
An' move!"

His eyes were mad, pupils dilated, heroin? I wondered, being unfamiliar with the drug scene.

My heart thundered, such things happened only in stories, on telly, or to other people!

Usually Neil came home about 5.30pm after a few beers with his mates. In less than an hour I could be.....Oh, dear God, no.....Please.

The man sat at the table with the gun trained on me. Trembling, dizzy, I opened the fridge and took out the steak and kidney pie I had made for tea, placed it in the oven which I switched on 'high'.



Suddenly he got up, brutally brushed me aside and opened the fridge to seize two cans of beer from the back of the door. Still clutching the gun, he grabbed my handbag from the table and emptied its contents — \$10, all I had, into his hip pocket.

"I'm starvin'," he glowered. "Siddown Y'making me nervous. This bread's peanuts. I wan' some more. A shave an' a change o' gear. You gotta feller?"

"Yes, my husband!"

"Where is 'e?"

"Be home from work any minute," I lied.

"What's 'e do?"

"He's a truckie."

The man muttered an obscenity, then,

"Lucky feller. You're quite a dish!"

I shuddered. Every woman's nightmare — the rapist killer

While the pie was heating, he forced me, at gunpoint, to get him a razor and change of clothes. I brought him some old jeans of Neil's and a T-shirt. Then, clutching me, he marched me back to the kitchen.

"I wanna fag," he ordered.

"We don't smoke!"

Handing me an opened beer can he said, "Getta bit more will ya matey. 'Oo d'y 'think y'are? Ere, 'ave a swig."

"I don't drink!"

He laughed like a maniac. "Y'don' drink. Well, well. Don' smoke either. Mus' like doin' something by the looks o' yer." He sniggered lecherously.

I felt like a trapped animal. It was 5 pm, why couldn't Neil be early for once?

I watched while one-handed he plugged into the power point and buzzed his face with the shaver. He thundered, "Quit gapin' will yer, 'n gimme some more grog!"

"There isn't any more," I said.

"Is that so?" Putting the shaver on the table and swilling the remainder of the beer, he stepped behind me, gun still in hand, and pinched my left buttock so hard I cried out.

"Ar shut up. An' serve that tucker!"

With that he swiped me on the jaw and I staggered against the table. I felt one of my teeth loosen, then blood on my lips. Degraded, full of loathing, I took the lukewarm pie from the oven, slapped some in a bowl and handed it to him.

Wolfing a huge mouthful, he moved like lightning, put the gun on the table then from the back, pinioned my arms behind me. Making certain of an uninterrupted meal, he kneed me in the rear, forcing me onto a chair and gagged me with a tea towel.

Struggling, desperately clinging to sanity, I lifted one foot onto the table and kicked the rifle onto the floor. It discharged with a deafening crack, wounding him in the instep.

As blood splashed the vinyl, he collapsed onto a chair, while quickly I bent and grabbed the gun.

"You bird-brained moron," he bawled, then hobbling about, attempting to stand, grabbed my hair.

Terror stricken, unable to cry out, sweat poured from me. I broke free, leaving hair in his hand. An appalling pain began grinding my pelvic area. Although I had no idea of how to fire a gun, I pointed it at him, feeling for the trigger. He tried to wrench it from me, but I hung on grimly.

The gag was tight and suffocating and I felt near to fainting during this ghastly struggle for survival with a deadly weapon. The room had begun to tilt when the sound of a truck crunching to a halt out-side flooded me with relief.

A moment later the door flew open and Neil stood open mouthed. "What the...he began. "Who's this?" Quickly he untagged me. "You all right?"

"Yes. Here, the gun!" I shrieked.

He took it from me just as the man lunged and Neil punched him to the floor. Noticing my bleeding mouth, he roared "You...If you've injured my wife badly, you're gone mate."

"Ar, bull. She's plugged me in one foot," he groaned.

"Move again, and I'll plug you in the other. Who are you anyway? And what do you want?"

The man, still on the floor, was silent.

"Who is he, Viv?"

"I don't know. One of those jail escapees, I think. He broke in, attacked me, we struggled and the gun went off. He's got my keys in his pocket."

"Keys mate," bellowed Neil, keeping him covered.

The man hurled them at him.

"Viv, nick over to Jim's and ring the cops."

"Jim and Val are out. But I'll get help somehow."

With a smarting, swollen jaw and leaden legs, I staggered into the deserted street. Despite shock and confusion, I remember thinking how comical this cowardly fugitive looked with half a red beard!

Apart from Jim and Val, the nearest civilisation was almost a kilometre away — the little store, and it would be closed now. Hoping to hail a passing car, I noticed a light in Val's kitchen. There must have been a change in their plans. Running towards me was Jim.

"Hey, Viv!" he shouted.

"Thought we heard a shot or a blow-out. You okay?"

"No. Get the police, Jim. And step on it. Neil's holding a jail escapee!"

"What?"

"Jim, get going, for God's sake. Do you hear?"

As he began tearing home, the pain in my abdomen became intolerable. Moaning, I sank down into the long grass, then oblivion.

What seemed like centuries later, emerging from billowing mists with Neil holding my hand, a sister, doctor, policeman, Jim and Val around my bed, everything white came the antiseptic smell of hospital, then cold realisation. I had lost my baby.

"Police'd like to ask you some questions, love. Feel up to it?" Neil asked.

I didn't and promptly passed out again.

Next day two police officers interrogated me to their satisfaction — despite my difficulty of trying to

think straight after our tragic loss.

Safely in custody, our charming visitor had not been one of the wanted men from the security block, but an escaped mental patient from a psychiatric hospital who had eluded police for the past week. The jailbirds had been caught in a stolen car and, after a shootout with police, were apprehended and were once more behind bars.

Home again, life continued in Sleepy Hollow. Re-thinking our priorities, we started sacrificing other commodities for a much-needed telephone.

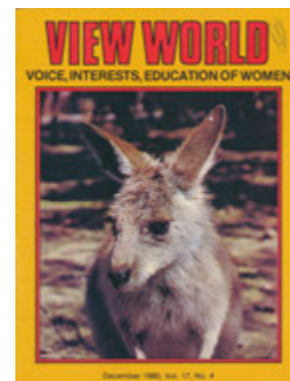
Besieged by reporters, we appeared on television. Then, in the mall came an official letter of commendation and notice of a pending citation for bravery and presence of mind.

I had been much more interested in absence of body! I didn't feel very brave. On the contrary, just careless for leaving a window unlocked!

In the company of fellow 'heroes' I was to receive a medal to be presented by the

Governor at a ceremony at Government House, a place we had scarcely ever expected to visit, except maybe through the tradesmen's entrance.

Although mightily ego-building, all of it seemed little compensation for losing one's child. There are no medals for that.



SOAP OPERA

R C Lawrence

Wellington VIEW Club
2nd Prize Short Story Competition 1970

Mrs. Betterbee was a thrifty, cleanly widow. She had a modest competence and a beautiful, yellow-haired daughter, Dulcibella. All should have been well with her but her thrift and cleanliness did not make for peace of mind—the one called for soap and cleaning agents, and the other regretted the outlay necessary to obtain them.

Then one day she saw a large advertisement showing a mother of 10 who vouched for the advantage of Satin Soap over all competitors. She herself used Satin Soap. She could not believe this woman allowed herself to be used for nothing.

Mr. Betterbee rose purposefully to her feet. She found pen and paper and, from the depths of her thrift and need to use more and more of the satisfactory Satin Soap, she poured forth wholehearted praise of the product.

Satin's Advertising Manager was greatly struck with her effort. "This", he said, "is sincerity. Go, Mrs. Best and interview this good soul. "See," he added, descending to the mundane, "If she is as good as she sounds."

Mrs. Best found Mrs. Betterbee (as she very well might, did she only know it) on her knees beside a bucket, a scrubbing brush and large cake of Satin. The house shone.

Dulcibella come home and she too shone.

"Wholesome is the word, Mrs. Betterbee!" exclaimed Mrs. Best. "You are wholesome, your daughter is wholesome, and your home is wholesome."

She returned to her boss. "Mrs. Betterbee," she reported "is the shining example to all housewives, and she certainly does use Satin!"

"Then let us use her," he cried.

Mrs. Betterbee was approached.

Might they, they asked gently, use her to show the type of home where Satin reigned supreme? Mrs. Betterbee could scarcely restrain her interest, but did so.

"I might," she said, adding hesitantly, "Soap is so expensive

"My dear Mrs. Betterbee, just don't you worry about that, let us be your Satin Bank!" The Advertising Manager rolled the phrase around his tongue. Satin Bank! He must use that again.

"By all means," agreed Mrs. Betterbee swiftly.

Her solicitor called on Satin. He explained that, while Mrs. Betterbee had the greatest faith in their good intentions, she wished to be quite sure that she, her daughter and her home could only be presented to the public in a wholesome manner.

"My dear man," cried the Advertising Manager, "our only aim is to retain just that wholesome spirit which is the very essence of Mrs. Betterbee's home. We have no hesitation in putting our name to any contract calling for that."

"What recompense for this use of her name do you intend making Mrs. Betterbee?" her solicitor went on.

"Recompense ... ah, yes," murmured the other.

The solicitor broke in, suggesting, "I think that if you could undertake to supply your soap to Mrs. Betterbee ..."

The Advertising Manager threw up his hands. "Say no more," he cried, "we will be only too pleased to provide Satin Soap." He rolled his eyes Heavenwards and thought of Mrs. Betterbee's frail scrawniness, and went on, "to the day she dies! Providing, of course, that she uses no other," he added.

The solicitor knew that his client would go along with that, and shortly

a watertight document was drawn up and signed by both parties. The one agreed to supply until the death of the other, Satin Soap at its present high standard. The other agreed to supply her home with no other soap, detergent or other cleaning agent and, within specified limits, to be ready to say so. Publicly.

Home was never happier. Mrs. Betterbee daily calculated the savings in her soap bill as she scrubbed, washed clothes, dishes and Dulcibella in Satin Soap. And, of course, herself. She was an honest woman.

Dulcibella reached her teens, left school, sought and found employment, sought and found beaux, and lost them. Successive lads fluttered towards the lustrous yellow hair, the kind blue eyes and peach-like complexion, but, missing they knew not what, fluttered away again, baffled until, on Monday morning, they passed their mother's steaming wash tubs.

Life at home became less happy-

"Mother," wept Dulcibella, Satin is not glamorous, no oomph!"

"Dulce," replied Mrs. Betterbee, "it is wholesome and comes for nothing"

Dulce had heard nothing past the word "wholesome". She became sly and took to sneaking showers and shampoos from friends and beaux fluttered and stayed. Soon one more persistent beau asked Dulcibella would she—and very shortly afterwards, Mrs. Betterbee married off her only daughter.

At home she aged, but did not wither away. Her scrawniness was wiriness and she remained fit scrubbing.

The years passed and Satin Products looked over Mrs. Betterbee's contract. They had been supplying her and her home with Satin Soap for rather a long time now and would fain have discontinued doing so. But the

agreement was clear, and watertight.

The current Public Relations Officer, a trouble buster who had busted successfully all previous trouble, visited Mrs. Betterbee, but here was no trouble, he decided.

"She is a frail old lady," he told them. "She is due to pass on any time. Let us wait. And they did . . .

At 99, Mrs. Betterbee awaited her hundredth birthday placidly. Dulcibella, her children and their children began making the usual arrangements to celebrate such an event. Satin Products, determined to gain something from their long beneficence, added their mite to the family's efforts.

It was decided to hold the party in her own home, her own so well and long known home. Satin products themselves had the rooms scoured on this occasion with their own renowned product, the scrawny old lady lovingly directing their labours.

She scoured her own person, also with Satin's product. In due course, she watched interestedly the installation of television cameras and listened to the heated arguments between commercial and non-commercial interests concerning the prominence of Satin Soap displays. The noncommercial attitude deplored the exploitation of a respected citizen's attainment of her century, but the commercial view insisted, on Satin's behalf, that their client was entitled to get something out of the old bag.

Mrs. Betterbee found herself torn two ways.

The morning came clear and sparkling, undoubtedly a further tribute to Satin's efficiency. Dulcibella arrived to help her previously entirely independent and self-sufficient mother into her party frock. If that morning found the overpoweringly wholesome spirit of the house in any

way offensive, she rose above that.

Soon Mrs. Betterbee sat enthroned in her favourite chair. Reporters had gathered. The television cameras were readied. There was a hush. . . . Over the years, Mrs. B. had become a celebrity, of a sort.

It was planned that television, the wonder of this age, should take direct to the public, a suitable speech by the most notable of the dignitaries there, this to be followed by the presentation by her great-grandchildren of their own personal gifts. It was expected to make a touching scene.

It began.

"My dear Mrs. Betterbee," began the dignitary, "it gives me great pleasure to. . ." He glared his platitudes into the cameras, but finally finished, "You and your home have ever been before us as examples of a wholesome way of life, of dependability and purity above the usual standards of this age, of. . .er. . .er. . . of wholesomeness, that is." He subsided triumphantly. Mrs. Betterbee smiled on him blandly.

Now the great-grandchildren came to lay in her lap their tributes. A succession of pretty papers and wrappings were opened to disclose chocolates, an uplifting book as unlikely to be read by the great-grandchild as the recipient, several lacey handkerchiefs. "Keep it natural," had planned Satin's current P.R.O.

At last came the smallest great-grandchild, a pretty little girl. The cameras concentrated. Shyly the girl handed Mrs. Betterbee a mauve-tinted parcel. Matching ribbons were tied around it. It was very effective. Said the little girl, "I chose the wrapping paper to match my present." So sweet. . . .

Mrs. Betterbee smiled and carefully unwrapped an oblong box. She opened it and saw three cakes of

lavender soap. She raised the box to her face and breathed deeply. She leaned forward and kissed the little girl warmly. "My dear," she told her gratefully, "thank you very much. This is something I have really missed!"



THE ADOPTION

Mrs. M. Gray

Katoomba VIEW Club 1st Prize Short Story Competition

The long rays of late winter sunshine struggled through the lacework of brick walls and chimneys and leafless tree-tops to fall in a pattern on the grey stone steps as the man and woman walked along the path and up to the entrance together, with diffident steps and in silence. After a moment's hesitation, they went through the imposing entrance of the old, straggling building, with its wings and added extensions stretching right and left, and crossed over into the office.

The girl behind the long desk motioned them to a seat while she ruffled with appointment books and the display of telephone plugs and cords on the communications board behind her. The restless hospital life floated past them as they waited—hurrying uniformed nurses, visitors wandering in and out, a couple of doctors, white-coated and in earnest conversation, students with stethoscopes dangling from their collars and sheafs of notes underarm. Then the telephone rang, sharply, and they were being directed—down some steps, across the hallway, up a flight of stairs and down to the end of a long corridor—the Welfare Sister

was waiting, her thin, grave face taking in at a glance the immaculate grooming of the neat business suit and trim, unadorned costume. Suddenly she smiled.

"Come this way. We shall need some particulars from you afterwards, but first we will show you the baby." She led them to a show window where a small cot was set apart from the others. As they looked down on the tiny occupant, returning their gaze with a cloudy, dark blue stare, the tension slowly melted and a suffused glow came over the woman's face. "He's beautiful," she said.

"Of course, you understand, if you take him now, legally he can't be yours for some months yet. The law allows a time of waiting, in case the mother should change her mind. This is certainly unlikely, especially in your case, otherwise you wouldn't be able to take him — still the possibility is there." It was the part of her work she dreaded most — yet how could it be avoided. Adopting parents, ready to take into their home a complete stranger, origin and genes unknown — shouldn't it be their right to take this new being from the start

and mould it to their life-style and character? Why should the babies, already with a handicap, be deprived of the earliest possible love, pride and care of parents, attentions which the best institution in the world could not give. And the poor little frightened mothers young mostly and very alone — surely they deserved this little respite, a short breathing space after the anguish and pain were past, to reconsider before it was too late.

There was no answer for a moment. Then the woman lifted her head, her eyes remaining on the cot, and smoothed her hands down her frock.

"How soon can we take him?" she asked. And the man, his apprehension fading, turned round and straightened his shoulders. "There are some papers for us to fill in?"

Chin propped up in one hand and right leg dangling over the side of the bed, the girl leaned on the over-bed table, and chewed the end of her pen while she struggled with the letter long indolence now made so difficult to write. She remembered her last communication with her parents — the brief, stark lines she had written them, to be read, she realised, with

mounting consternation and disbelief. She imagined the shock, the hurt, the agitated discussions and finally, the acceptance and her mother's carefully worded letter. 'Of course we are shocked and grieved, but our main concern is for you. You must make up your own mind about the baby, but under the circumstances your decision to have it adopted may be the best. We will help you if you want to keep it, but you know our district. We couldn't hide the circumstances of its birth. No matter how kind people are, it would still grow up without a father. Whatever you decide, you must come home as soon as possible.'

In a burst of concern her mother had added — "I will come to see you just as soon as I can." Alarmed at the thought of seeing her mother, she had scribbled back in haste — 'No' please you mustn't come. I am leaving here soon. I'll go into one of those places.' And she had given no address nor answered any more letters, even the last frantic appeal she had received — 'Please come home as soon as you can. You will need rest and care and we'll welcome the baby.'

She had no reason to blame her parents, she thought, but she couldn't break through the wall of resentment she had built from her inner shame and distress. She stared moodily across the empty ward. Three of the beds were still vacant after recent discharges and the two other women, "walking" patients now, were doubtless in the 'patients' waiting room where they could entertain their visitors with more freedom. She noticed the man and woman, walking quietly past the wide doors and along the corridor towards the main stairway and wondered idly what they had come for at this time of day. Hers was the last ward on this floor before the corridor branched off to another administrative wing, and although another flight of stairs led down and up, it was used only by staff — visitors

always came in the main entrance. There was nothing further along except the nursery.

The nursery! A sudden thought shot through her and she almost reeled in shock! Were they coming from the nursery? The viewing bell hadn't been rung yet so what were they doing there now? She almost cringed against the pillows while her wild thoughts took shape. A couple she thought — they must be adopting parents — they are going to take my baby! She had heard that, quite often babies were adopted straight from the hospital. But they mightn't be, she tried to reason. Perhaps they had been visiting a sick baby. Sometimes fragile babies were left behind when the mother was discharged. But not for long she knew, and this trim woman in the powder-blue suit with the spring in her step was no new mother. "But it may not be my baby," she told herself. She leaned forward as the awful truth seeped through her pressing her hands to her body as if to ease the pain. What did it matter when or how — she was going to lose him anyway. When she left the hospital it *would be alone, and suddenly the time pressed ominously close. Except for a small complication which had kept her in bed longer than usual, she already have been sent to the hospital convalescent home. It could be tomorrow - even today! Unbidden, almost unnoticed, large tears ran down her face and plopped onto the brief letter. She pushed it aside and, muffling her face on her folded arms on the bed-table, cried in long choking sobs that seemed to tear her heart out.

Nothing in the past anguished months had prepared her for this. The terrible weeks of loneliness and fear, the ignominy of entering the waiting-room, the dreaded moment of admission to the labour-ward. Coming up out of the clouds of pain, she had found comfort in the endless

routine of the ward. The staff were brisk but kind, treating her exactly as every-one else and addressing her as "Mrs." Because of a hospital ruling, she was expected to feed her baby for the first few days. At first the strange red-faced mite seemed unreal, but gradually she came to know him and enjoy his visits" Each time he was taken back there would be something else happening, and the protection of the regulated days and human contact was a relief. She had not let herself consider tomorrow or the future — until now.

She did not notice the two patients return, nor the screens drawn hurriedly round her bed. A worried Sister spoke to the senior nurse. "Tell the other nurses to keep the screens round number four. And leave her alone for the time being. You had better feed her baby in the nursery." Afterwards, when the first rush of the evening shift was over, she went to the bedside. She sat down before speaking, feeling her way carefully. "Now, then, supposing you tell me the reason for this upset." Head bent the girl sobbed on. "You aren't taking your baby with you when you leave is that it?" A choking hiccough gave some encouragement "It isn't an inevitable decision, you know. You can still change your mind. The law will give you a few months to think about it, — even if you don't take him now, so all isn't lost yet."

"What difference would it make?" the girl blurted through her sobs. "Now or later, it would be the same. He would still be illegitimate. Nothing can change that."

"Is there anyone who could help you — the father?"

"He can't do anything!" She spoke so sharply that Sister was silent a moment. She remembered suddenly the long, visit less hours and asked: "Do your parents know about this?"



The girl pointed to the pad and the Sister glanced at scant information it held. "Well now, we must get this posted today. If you just write the address —",

She picked up the pen and the girl signed her name bleakly on the tear-splashed sheet, and wrote shakily on an equally blotched envelope. Sister took it, noting silently the barely discernible words which would certainly need rewriting on a fresh package. "Now," she said briskly, "We must look ahead. I think you could be transferred soon to the rest-home." You will feel better there and there is a garden to walk in. You have seen the Almoner here?" A nod. "Well then, she will call to see you at the home, and help you make your travelling arrangements. Perhaps it would be as well if we kept the baby in the nursery."

"Oh no — Please, I must see him once - more!" The imploring look made her say, doubtfully. "Very-well nurse will bring him to you for a little while after his last feed. Then you settle down and we will make sure you have a good night's sleep. Tomorrow will be a new day"

Weeping more quietly now her thoughts whirled back. "The Father!" she muttered, smiling grimly at the resemblance of his horrified recoil when she had told him. Though, why he should have been so shocked, she had thought resentfully"

He spoke at last — "I can't do anything, I'm sorry, very sorry — I'm married." "Divorce?" The word hissed out through clenched teeth "No," he said. "No, it's impossible. I have a child — I'm sorry"

The silence stretched to eternity. "Look" he said uncomfortably, "I know it's hard for you — but there are places you can go in the city — for help" He fumbled in his pocket for a wallet and pen. He went to the table, deliberated, opened a cheque-book wrote carefully in it. "This will help you out" He considered again, and hastily scribbled on a small note-pad pushing them towards her. "This bank will cash it. I have to go back interstate now, but if you need anything more the bank will contact me for you." He went on, and she angrily screwed the offending papers and threw them in the corner. But much later, after hours of fruitless, bewildered, worrying, she retrieved them both. "Why shouldn't I?" she told herself aloud, "it costs him nothing else and I need it!" But she would never go back to the bank — never. She tore the note in small bits.

The cheque was a generous one. It enabled her to leave her job before the reason became evident, and this had meant a good reference. She changed accommodation, and occasional casual work, found with the help of the welfare people, tided her over the long, miserable weeks until she entered the Home.

Nothing could assuage her misery now. The tea-tray was brought in and removed untouched. She took no notice of the nurses, strangely quiet, nor the new patient wheeled in to the far bed. The two women, returning, ate their meal and read in silence.

It was unusual for the Matron to visit at night, but she appeared suddenly at the desk, talking with Sister. "I hate to trouble you, but something must be done, she is completely overcome. She is really due to go to the Rest-home, but Doctor had kept her because of a temperature. But the people may come for the baby soon. She mustn't be here then."

"I agree," said Matron. "I'll speak to Doctor and make arrangements for her transfer first thing in the morning. After all, she is improving, and if anything arises she can be admitted again to a different ward. I will speak to her now."

The, new patient was asleep and the other discreetly absent as Matron disappeared behind the curtains. She touched the weeping figure on her shoulder. "Won't you calm yourself now and talk this over? Perhaps we can help you." After a while the sobbing quieted and the girl sat up, sniffing into a dampened handkerchief. "Nobody can help me — no one. I have to give my baby away."

"Why must you?"

"Because — because he has no father,

and it's best for him if I don't keep him."

"Is there no other way — your parents, perhaps?"

"They said I could bring him home. We live in the country. My parents have lived there nearly all their lives. Everyone knows them, they are well respected, don't you see, it isn't fair to them, and my baby — every-one would know about him — all his, life." She was calmer now. I want him to have a real home. It isn't his fault — about his birth. Do you think" — almost hopefully — I could look after him?"

"I don't know," Matron said, "perhaps you could. It is not difficult to care for a little baby. Only he won't remain small for long. He'll grow, soon he'll be walking, then going to school. It may be hard for him then. Children love conformity, they can be unintentionally cruel. It could be traumatic for the one who is different."

She paused, thinking carefully. "I do not wish to influence your decision. But since you are so sincere, I feel bound to say that, in general, I believe children are better off in a normal family, even if it is not their natural one."

"I'll never see him again!"

"No, but many mothers lose their children — some can never have their own. Life gives us many crosses to carry, and we must bear them as best we can. You are too intelligent to let this ruin your life. Give your-self a little time. One day you will have your own home, with husband and family."

"He won't ever know me!"

"Someday he will know of you. He will realise you gave him up for his own sake. I believe your decision to be the only truly unselfish one. You have given him life, and a home. No mother does more than that."

A sudden thought chilled her.

"Suppose no one takes him?"

"Now that we can assure you about. There is a great demand for babies, and he is so bonny, someone will very soon claim him — perhaps almost immediately. You can be certain he will have a good home, there are authorities to make sure of that, and to watch over him. Adopting parents are very carefully selected. Which is more," she added wryly, "than can be said of natural ones."

Now we must consider you. After you have had a good sleep, we will transfer you in the morning to a convalescent home. You will be happier there. In a few days you will be ready to leave. What will you do then? Your parents want you — will you go to them?"

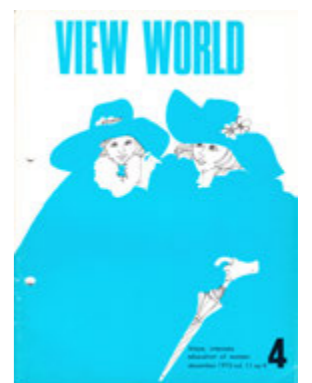
Somehow, the mention of her parents melted the barrier she had built between them, and she thought of her home with warmth — the aroma of baking coming from the farmhouse kitchen, her brothers, chasing each other about their chores, her father coming in for the morning "News". But mostly she thought of her mother — understanding, concerned, sympathetic, loving. A nostalgic longing enveloped her. "Yes!" she said, "I will go home!"

The bright morning sun splashed over the steps as the man and woman, walking with brisk confidence, entered the large doors and climbed the stairs. Between them they carried a basket. At the nursery, a small group awaited them. And while the man attended to the final signing and sister explained the intricacies of formulas and routines, the woman took the baby and exchanged the time-yellowed napkin for, a soft, white, towelling one. Then she dressed him in a beautiful, hand-knitted outfit, his tiny head almost drowning in the bonnet. "He's a really beautiful, healthy baby. You should have no trouble with him," sister said. "I know," the woman replied, warmly. "We mean to tell

him about his birth — as soon as he understands."

Matron, standing by, smiled at her. "We don't know much about the father. But the mother is a fine, sensible girl, obviously from a good family background. When he asks, you can tell him she really loved him."

She helped tuck the baby into the white, frilled basket, pulling up the flower-embroidered blue silk coverlet. And the man and woman, taking it proudly between them, walked back along the corridor and out into the warm fragrance of a new spring day.



VIEW World September 1980

AS OTHERS SEE US

Jean Gye
Maroubra VIEW Club

Sadie Martin settled herself comfortably in the tourist coach and looked around her. There was only one other passenger to date, an elderly, rather frail looking woman checking the contents of her handbag.

Just in time Sadie stopped from calling a friendly greeting to her. This trip she wasn't going to be the first to make friendly overtures.

After much thought she'd decided that once again she would take a coach holiday. She had done this for the past five years, but on her return home she'd always felt let down. They had never really lived up to the glowing advertisements — travel by coach, see interesting places, meet new people, make new friends, etc. Not for her anyway.

She'd certainly seen places of interest and met loads of people, but made new friends — never.

What had gone wrong, she'd ponder, was it her or other people? She knew she was friendly to everyone, but she felt people were distant in their manner to her. She checked carefully for body odour and bad breath. No, she was sure the fault lay not there, but in her personality.

Last year the painful truth had been revealed on the last stop before Sydney. She was feeling tired and somewhat rejected when everyone scrambled off the coach for a quick cup of tea before the last stage of the trip.

Instead of leaving the coach with the others, Sadie decided to close her eyes and rest. She had almost dozed off when two male passengers standing close to the bus said something that caught her attention.

"Well, it's been a good trip, Jack, don't you agree?"

"Yes," Jack replied, "except for that fat old bore trying to run everything. She

never stops talking if you're unlucky enough to get landed with her."

"Yes, I know," the other cut in. "Silly old fool, who wants to hear about her travels? She's always too ready to help and offer suggestions — a regular bore."

A painful flush flooded Sadie's face and her hands trembled. There was no doubt that she was the subject of their discussion. Tears filled her eyes, please God she could control herself before the others returned.

A short time later she heard the others returning. Her seat companion remarked: "Didn't see you in the cafe. Didn't you feel like a cuppa?"

"No," Sadie replied. "I felt tired and thought I'd just sit and rest."

For the last 60 km Sadie spoke only when directly addressed, which wasn't often. When some of the passengers started to sing, others joined in and soon a regular singsong was in progress. Most times she had been the one to start — few people noticed that she didn't join in and those who did thought idly that the trip had tired her or that she was feeling blue that the holiday was ending.

Sadie hardly noticed the singing; her thoughts were busy trying to see herself with a stranger's eye. She was fair enough to see that there was such a thing as being too friendly. Others might see it as pushing. If someone mentioned indigestion, she'd dive into her bag and produce a tablet. The same for a headache and usually she offered cologne for a handkerchief, advising that it be placed on the forehead. She had a suggestion for any ache or pain.

The same thing happened when she was in a group wondering what to do. Of course if anyone mentioned doing a tour that she'd already done, they were for it! This was meat and drink to her! Out would come photographs and

details of what she'd seen and done.

Yes, those men were right. She was a bore! She'd been badly hurt, but she knew where she'd gone wrong. It is not often we are given the chance to see ourselves as others see us, she told herself.

At the end of the trip she'd not suggested meeting any of them again and, as usual, no one asked for her address or telephone number. The plump middle-aged widow returned home sadder, but much wiser. At last she knew the truth and she was determined never again to give anyone reason to speak like that about her.

She had decided that coach tours were out, she wouldn't be seen dead on one! But when holiday time came round again, she thought that as she now knew her shortcomings, she'd try just once more. Her few relatives had their own families and as there were no children from her marriage, she must depend on her own resources for pleasure.

After Sid's death, she had gone back to work in the mail order department of a large city store. She had left there seven years before to marry Sid and now it seemed as though her brief marriage was just a happy interlude.

Sadie did not wish to remarry and life went on its old way. There were one or two old cronies at the office with whom she was rather friendly and in the lunch hour they would sit talking or go shopping. Then there were the staff theatre parties and, of course, she always helped organise the Christmas party.

This year she had decided to leave the job to someone else. However, after much persuasion, she'd changed her mind and helped as usual. When told how good she was at that sort of thing, she'd flushed with pleasure but hadn't let the praise go to her head.

as others see us

BY PHYL GYE / MAROUBRA CLUB



in Sadie Martin, many changes in her behaviour. Now she was about to find out if people would be more friendly to the “new” Sadie.

She gazed with interest at the people who boarded the coach and smiled pleasantly at the youngish woman who flopped into the seat beside her. At last they were under way. The coach captain pointed out places of interest and explained their itinerary. It seemed as though the next 10 days could be very enjoyable.

Sadie liked people and wanted to be liked in return. She hoped to finish this holiday having made at least one good friend, someone with similar interests. Perhaps they could go on a holiday together?

The first week passed pleasantly enough — the scenery was beautiful, the weather mild and sunny and the other passengers very nice.

Sadie didn't talk about her previous trips, except on the couple of occasions when she'd been asked if she had done any other tours. Her answers had been brief and she made a point of not chattering on and on, no matter what the subject.

On the eighth day they ran into a severe storm. The lightning flashed and the thunder, combined with the noise of the rain, made speech impossible.

Fiona Caldwell, Sadie's seat companion, trembled and covered her face as the lightning flashed. Several times she grabbed Sadie's arm. Sadie took her hand and held it firmly and she was rewarded by a grateful glance from terrified brown eyes.

It was obvious the other passengers also felt uneasy as the coach made its way through the storm. For several kilometres the narrow road wound its way down the side of a mountain. Not a good place to be caught in a storm! And an unwise place for the driver of such a large coach to consider stopping.

It seemed that they had been driving for hours when it happened. Sadie was no braver than the rest, and she screamed as she felt the bus skid and slide over the mountain, finishing on its side.

How long she lay stunned she didn't know, but she was conscious of her surroundings. She could hear a confused murmur of moans and the whimpering of the two children in the

group. All was dark, but she could feel that the large bag in which she carried all her “bits and pieces”, still hung from her left wrist.

With her right hand she felt for the torch she always carried, but the pain was extreme. Something wrong there, she thought, wincing in agony as the pain ran from her shoulder to her wrist. Dropping the bag beside her, her left hand grasped for the torch. Thank God, it still works, she thought as she flashed the beam around her.

Fiona lay beside her, blood oozing from a gash in her forehead. The driver was not to be seen, he must have been thrown out!

Shaking, she struggled to her knees. Leaning over Fiona she was relieved to hear a faint moaning — at least she was alive. Nothing she could do now, she must find out how the others had fared.

Few had escaped injury. Of the seven male passengers, all were out of action except one elderly man, Mr Jenkins, who had struggled to a sitting position and looked a ghastly colour. He was feeling for something in his pocket and when she asked if she could help, he murmured: “My heart

tablets, always carry them.” Sadie found them in his pocket and left his side only when he'd placed one in his mouth.

“Now please, everyone listen. We must get help quickly. Get any torches you have and keep one or two going while I'm gone.”

“Gone?” someone asked.

“Look, I seem to have got off fairly lightly and someone must go for help.” She crawled to the door and looked back, “Try and comfort the children. I'll be as quick as possible.”

Scrambling out of the coach, she saw the driver lying crumpled some distance away. With difficulty she made her way to him and a dry sob escaped her lips — he was past helping.

Turning, she struggled towards the road. Her progress was slow — the pain in her arm and shortness of breath forced her to stop and rest frequently. After what seemed hours, she was on the road flashing the torch to attract attention.

When the first car stopped, she asked the driver to ring for an ambulance. She continued flashing the light until another car stopped and one of the passengers relieved her. In no time, a group was making its way down the mountain to help the victims until the ambulance arrived.

A lady from one of the cars produced a thermos of coffee and Sadie gratefully gulped the steaming liquid. Someone placed a rug around her shoulders and her shivering eased. She wasn't cold, but shock had set in. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when, at last, sirens heralded the ambulances' approach.

The driver had been killed instantly and there were several with broken limbs, concussion and shock. Sadie had a badly dislocated shoulder and

a torn muscle in her forearm. She was also badly shocked.

As those who had sufficiently recovered left the hospital, they brought copies of the Sydney and local papers. They pointed out photographs of the accident and the injured being brought up the mountains.

There was one of herself being helped into the ambulance and a story describing how, with presence of mind, she'd managed to get help so soon.

Young David White said she was the heroine of their group and presented her with a lovely arrangement of flowers. The card read “To the heroine of the tour, from your grateful fellow travellers”.

As they took their leave, they thanked her and some exchanged telephone numbers. Cath Dorrington suggested when all were off the sick list they have a “get together”. Her two young sons, Matthew and Paul, insisted on hugging Mrs Martin.

Sadie left the hospital before Mr Jenkins who, apart from minor injuries, had suffered a severe heart attack. It would be some time before he'd be fit to leave. Fiona, also, would be in hospital for a little longer.

When she said goodbye to Fiona, the younger woman clung to her hand. “You were wonderful to me the night of the accident. You understood that I was terrified of the storm. That's one night I'll never forget. I'll contact you as soon as I'm back in Sydney.”

It was with a warm glow deep inside that Sadie stepped into the car that was taking her and two others to Sydney. This was one holiday she'd never forget. Although there had been a tragic accident, she had not made a fool of herself and she had made at least one friend. she hoped!



THE RED GERANIUM

Winifred Potts
Mudgee VIEW Club.

Like a drought stricken crow, all bone and leathery skin, she moved slowly to the back door. She wanted to see if the red geranium was in full bloom, it should be today.

For years, she couldn't remember how many, a piece of red geranium had been with her in a variety of tins and homes. Her talisman, if it managed to bloom it was a good omen. So few times it had been able to bloom — year after year some disaster struck just as the flowers formed and she didn't see its blossom.

They'd move on and a cutting would go in yet another Golden Syrup tin. It had survived drought because she always emptied the tea pot around its roots. Several times the cow ate it off. And the kids, playing and wrestling, broke it down more times than she could remember. But always there was enough left to put in another syrup tin.

The year they'd bought this place she'd seen its blood red blossom, plenty of rain, the kids all grown up and a proper fence had helped. Yes, it had been a good omen.

Scummed eyes peering through red-rimmed lash less eyelids, she picked

her way carefully down the steps and turned to look at the geranium growing in a half kerosene tin, its cluster of red blossom flaming against the dark leaves.

Delighted, she stooped to see more clearly. As she moved her feet to get closer, the folded bag that served as a door mat twisted around her foot. Falling, she grabbed at anything and pulled the geranium and tin across her body. Legs up the step, head on the path, she lay shaken and dazed.

As her senses returned she became aware of pain, her legs wouldn't move. She was angry too, she'd never fallen before. Gawd, she'd lay here like a lambing ewe until the crows picked her eyes out! Better call Beattie, she was here a while ago. But the cry of "Beattie, Beattie" was only a crackle drowned by the rustling leaves and bird calls.

The pain was worse, she tried to push the tin off her chest but one arm was under her body and there was not enough strength in the remaining one. She called again, "Beattie, Beattie," but only the birds replied.

Drat the girl. She came giving advice

when it wasn't wanted, why couldn't she come now? A tear trickled from the corner of her sandy-blighted eyes. Poor Beattie, her hair had gone blue lately. Funny none of her family had gone blue with age. Or Alf's family either. Mustn't mention it, might hurt Beattie's feelings. Could be her eyes were worse.

Her back and arm, cold on the path, were numb to pain. She lapsed into a floating dream where her body was separated from her brain. This agony was in someone else's body. The red blossom was quite close, quite clear, it comforted her. Lately she would remember the events of years ago more clearly than what happened yesterday, perhaps because the past was more important.

With her free hand she touched the red blossom. The first piece of red geranium had been her wedding bouquet. Drought or no drought they'd had to be married while the travelling parson was in their part of the parish.

When Alf arrived at her mother's house he'd fished under the seat of the loaded dray and put the red geranium in her hand. "Nicked it from the Pub verandah," he'd said.

A great wedding she'd had. Neighbours had come from miles away and stayed till daybreak dancing on the dirt floor, choking in the dust which they'd washed away with mother's home brew.

Daybreak and the loaded dray with Alf and her aboard, cheered by the exhausted guests, had set off for their first home — a shelter over the dray and a fencing contract. The geranium stalk, bedded in a baking powder tin, rode on her lap.

The past floated through her dazed brain — fencing contracts, rabbiting, poison trails, ringbarking, grubbing, always moving. Bearing babies in all sorts of places helped by anyone who happened to be handy, and always the geranium, or some part of it, in a tin of some sort.

The geranium bloomed the year Alf got the job boundary riding, with a house too, their first real house. Transplanted from the tin, the geranium had real ground to grow in but had to struggle for survival against a robust mob of kids. Their first taste of school, too.

It was there Beattie was born, in a real bed with sheets and women to help. Against all odds — children, cows, chooks and drought — it had been a mass of blossom, a good omen.

A great comfort Beattie had been, the last of her babies. The others drifted away, some dead, she couldn't remember how many, some came back clearly, others vague names. If she

called they might hear. The crackle from her withered lips came faintly, "Alfie, George, Clara, Bill" but she was too exhausted to think of more.

Anger against Beattie, who hadn't come, helped ease her pain. Interfering hussy, thought she was going to get her out of this, the only home Alf and she had ever owned. Never! They'd carried Alf out and they'd have to carry her out!

"Come into town and get one of those all electricity places," Beattie had said. They'd even taken her in to see it, driving so fast she couldn't see a damn thing. What was the use of going anywhere if you couldn't see anything? Now poking along in a dray or a sulky you could see for miles and every blade of grass or beast close by.

When she'd seen the "all electricity" box of a joint she knew she'd smother locked up there. "You must have the phone Mother." They'd got the jangling thing, what use was it to her now? She couldn't get to it.

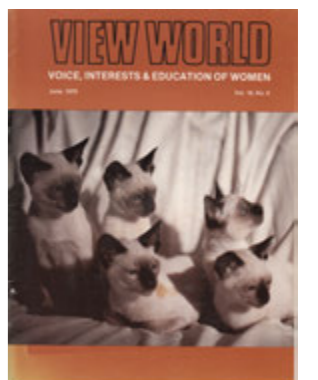
Anger had drawn her back to reality. She must do something, she'd survived in worse places than this. The road wasn't so very far away. With her shaking free hand she snapped the red cluster from the geranium, then rested the weary arm. Her knotted fingers clutched the stalk, fearful that it might slip away from them. Every time she stirred from her hazy memory flights, with renewed energy the shrivelled bony arm would rise and wave the red geranium flowers.

The school bus stopped at the crossroads and tumbled out its last leggy passengers. As the driver pulled the wheel to turn, a moving red blur made him look again at "the old girl's yard". Queer, it moved again. Red stop light, he thought and grinned. Better look, probably get bused.

He drove the bus to the fence and saw her before he'd stopped. Leaping the fence, he peeled off his jumper as he went. Breathless, he knelt beside her and put the jumper under her head. He felt her pulse, good, but the old girl was unconscious.

He lifted the tin from her chest, released her pinned arm and proceeded to feel her legs. The unexpected rasping voice startled him, "Stop playing around with my leg, young feller." Laughing he ran to the phone.

They carried her out, still clutching her beloved geranium, and the bus driver remarked, "The spirit that tamed the west isn't beaten yet!"



VIEW World June 1981

NO SACRIFICE

June Wynne

Mudgee Day VIEW Club

Elise stood at the window, the solicitor's letter from London in her hand. Tears filled her eyes. The peaceful garden, the distant hills, the sound of farm machinery, how she had come to love it all in the six months she had been here.

Like a dream she recalled that terrible time six months ago when the cable had arrived at the modest house in London which she shared with her aged father. Her younger sister, Alison, and her husband, Don, had been killed in a car accident.

Still dazed and wondering what would become of Alison's two children, her father had died in his sleep. The shock following so closely on his wife's death had been too much for him.

The letter from Don's brother suggesting that she should come and take charge of the children had arrived the day after her father's funeral. Leaving everything to the solicitor, she had packed a few clothes, rushed through the necessary formalities and booked on the first available flight.

She wanted to get away from so much sorrow and to see Alison's children. She, who had never been anywhere except for short seaside holidays when her parents had been in better health.

A lump rose in her throat as she remembered how she had encouraged Alison to go on a working holiday, dreading that Alison one day would find herself bound by duty as she was.

Happy, fun-loving Alison had met and married Don in Australia and her letters had been full of him and then their twins, with an occasional mention of Don's brother, Simon. Simon, who had written suggesting Elise should come to Australia, had only been a name to her.

It had been six months of peace and quiet happiness. The only note of discord had been when she had said

she would take the children home to England to rear them.

"I am their legal guardian," Simon had said, bluntly. "I only suggested that you come and take charge of them. They are all I have." The subject had never been mentioned since.

Now the solicitor wanted to know what she intended to do about the house and contents as the legalities had been settled. Sell it, her heart screamed, but common-sense told her she might need to return to it.

This peace and comfortable happiness couldn't go on much longer. Right now the children needed a woman's care, but one day they would be independent of her.

Simon might wish to marry one day. Mrs James, who came over to help with the house every day, often spoke of the girl from Sydney who visited Simon frequently while holidaying nearby.

And there were those pink envelopes that came in the mail fairly often, obviously a woman's writing. Every time she saw him pick them out of the mail her heart turned over. He never seemed to be in a hurry to read them and she always imagined that he wanted to read them in private.

Once he had laughingly suggested, "We should get married. It would simplify things." She had sat still and frozen. When she did raise her head from her sewing, he had taken her shocked look as a reprimand and fled with a hasty, "I'm sorry." The incident had not been mentioned since.

How she had grown to love this big blundering, laughing man. So straight forward, so honest, telling the children so simply that he loved them. Playing and romping, yet so quietly firm.

Little by little her reserve had melted and now she, too, could say "I love you" to the children. It had been

hard at first, having lived so long in an undemonstrative home, where kindness and consideration were the only signs of affection.

Simon had been very kind to her, insisting that she learn to drive. When she took the children into town to shop it was like a social outing — the girls in the shops knew the children and were soon using her christian name. Young mothers struck up conversation with her about the children. It was all so friendly and different from rushing into a big store and rushing home from work, laden, to do more work.

She had even been taking the children to a play group once a week and had been out to lunch a few times with young women who soon found the kind, warm woman beneath her cool reserve. She would hate to leave, but it couldn't go on forever. The solicitor's letter would be her opening to say something to Simon.

Bath time for the children had been the usual laughing, fun time. She had stood watching as she always did, amazed at the gentleness of such a big man. Now, with the children tucked up in bed, she sat in the cosy living room with Simon. Only the outside night sounds disturbed the quiet as she knitted and he lay back in his arm-chair smoking his pipe.

He thought how beautiful she was, the table light touching the soft curve of her cheek and her full, generous mouth. Her hair glowed like a soft halo since she no longer flattened and suppressed it.

If only she would give him more of those soft slow smiles she gave the twins. He wished he hadn't been so brash when he had suggested marriage but she had caught at his heart the minute he met her at the airport. Now, as she sat with that indescribable aura of peace and stillness around her, he ached to hold



her forever. He would ask her to marry him now.

Elise raised her head as he removed his pipe and prepared to speak. Because she knew she would have to talk quickly or not at all, she said, "I had a letter from the solicitor today. He wants to know what I intend doing with the house."

Simon looked down at the pipe in his hand. "What do you intend doing?"

"I don't want to sell it because I will have to return someday. The contents will have to be sold or stored and I'll have to go back for a few weeks to do that. Then I'll lease the house and return here until the children no longer need me." Her cool, flat voice hid her pain at the thought of leaving all she had grown to love.

He sighed and prayed he would say the right thing. "Elise, there'll never be any need for you to return to London your home is here now. The children will need your care for years yet. Marry me Elise and settle all the problems."

As she raised her eyes, full of sadness veiled with reserve, he knew he had been too brash and cursed himself for being such a blunt fool.

"Even for the children's sake, Simon, you don't have to make that sacrifice. I'll return and rear them until you really want to marry." The thought brought a lump to her throat but she continued. "I know you are interested in someone

so perhaps I could take the children to town to live. They would still be close yet would not interfere with your life."

He rose, towering over her. "Who said I'm interested in a woman? You are the only woman I've ever wanted to marry. Elise, I've loved you from the minute I met you. Can't you overlook my clumsiness and try to care for me a little? If you won't marry me I'll have to move to town." His usually slow, drawling voice shook. He rested a trembling hand on her shoulder and urged her to her feet.

She raised her head, eyes swimming, lips trembling, all her reserved calm melted. "What of the girl who visited here? What of the letters every week? Oh, Simon, don't marry me out of pity."

A slow smile crossed his face and he shook her gently. "Dear Elise, she is the daughter of my old school mate, my godchild, and she writes to me about horses. Really romantic.

He laughed as he drew her to him. "You will marry me Elise? Say yes, I love you so."

Head buried and tears so close, her muffled voice came to him — "Oh Simon, yes."

He raised her face to his and kissed her gently. "Try to love me a little, dear Elise."

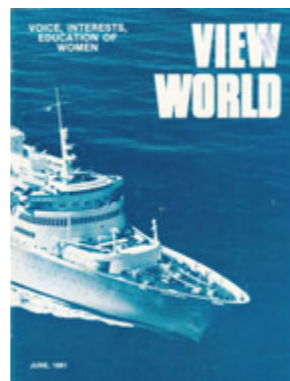
"I couldn't love you a little," she whispered. "I love you so much it

frightens me." She sighed, thankful that at last that awful shy reserve had slipped away from her.

She was on his knee; they were trying to be sensible now that the first joy of their revealed love was past.

"We'll be married straight away and go to London for our honeymoon. That way we can dispose of your house and finish with all your worries. We'll have to get someone to mind the children while we're away." This brought a worried frown to his face. Snuggled against him, Elise laughed softly. "We'll take them with us, four on a honeymoon!"

For the first time he heard her laugh out loud and the room echoed as his deep laugh mingled with hers-



The Most Beautiful Thing in the World

VIEW World March 1967

Patricia Stevenson

New Lambton Club
2nd Prize Literary Competition

Gino Martinelli sat on top of the most beautiful thing in the world and looked down into the smiling upturned faces of his four sons.

In the hand of his first-born Enrico, was the large gold fob watch that had belonged to his great-grandfather. It had been handed down, father to eldest son, as each achieved his majority, and it was Enrico's pride and joy.

Never known to deviate a second, it was always wound with solemn ceremony last thing at night, and its reliable old hands now showed the time as five minutes to seven. They were just three hundred seconds away from the fulfilment of a lifetime's dream.

Around them the early morning sun highlighted raindrops still clinging to leaf, blade and thorn. Weeks and weeks of heavy rain had changed the face of the normally brown Australian countryside to lush, bright areas of green and gold and red, reminding Gino of his birthplace, Acri, a farming community in southern Italy.

Thinking thus, as the last few minutes crept by, it was a natural step for him to trace the route he had taken, through the years, and across the world, which had led him to this spot, and to-day's great happiness.

Giovanni Martinelli, fifth son of a poor farmer, had opened his dark little eyes to a world which contained much love from a large family, and much poverty from his environment.

Besides his parents, his brothers, his two sisters, his grandmother and his mother's brother lived in the tiny farmhouse.

The family, true to Italian tradition, was very close-knit, but of all his relatives, Gino loved his Uncle Benito best. Uncle Benito always smelled delightfully of wine and tobacco, and, when sufficiently mellowed by self-indulgence, would sing in a voice fit for angels to hear. Of course one had to keep out of his way the following morning, when a boot where it hurt would be the only answer one would get to an unwelcome remark, but it was a small price to pay for the company of one so magnificent.

Gino learnt early that farm work meant hard work. As soon as he was big enough to hold a chunk of wood he was expected to help with the tree felling, planting, hoeing and harvesting. Times were hard in Italy in those pre-war years. Il Duce promised that the poor would be raised up level with the rich, but in the Galabria district, Mussolini's promises of paradise on earth were in the main not even known. There were no radios, and very few newspapers were ever seen.

Most of the community was illiterate anyway, so they lived their lives completely unaware of the glorious society in which they were supposedly a part.

All work on the farm was done by hand, in the manner of untold generations before them. The men and boys tilled the soil and planted crops. The women and girls picked the fruits and dug the vegetables. Gino skipped his way through the years, attending the village school when it suited his father, working from sunrise to sunset in the fields when it did not.

By the time he was seventeen his hands were calloused and his muscles hard. He loved beauty, but saw little of it, his heart stirred restlessly on many occasions, feeling there must be more to life than this ceaseless toil, trying to win from the land enough to keep them all. But for all this uneasiness, he found himself unable to make the break away from the tight family circle.

And then came the war. Gino, his brothers and friends were all visited by a short, abrupt man in army uniform and informed they had twenty-four hours to finalise their affairs before the lorries would arrive to take them to Taranto for preliminary training.

Oh the consternation! The tears! The lamentations! All through the little village sons packed, mothers

wept, fathers railed, but at eight the next morning the first "Attention!" of their army lives sprang them into the square on to the backs of the lorries and away down the dusty road.

In later years Gino could never remember the war very clearly.

It all seemed to telescope, the abrupt departure from the farm, training camp, ship, desert warfare, advance, retreat, advance, retreat, capture.

From a never ending rush and in a confusion he found himself in a comparatively quiet compound with a thousand other Italians and Sicilians, surrounded by barbed wire, and guarded by a group of tall, spare, incomprehensible men whom he was told were Australians. As Gino had never been aware there was a country called Australia, and had thought he was fighting Englishmen, it took him some time to get the matter straightened out.

But he finally did, and he spent four years, in one place or another, behind that inevitable barbed wire fence. He endured it, as part of his nature was to waste no energy on what could not be altered, rather to save it for the future. In every camp he tried to grow a little bit of greenery as food for his beauty-starved soul, in the interim he picked up a considerable amount of English, without actually realising it.

Finally the war ended, and back to Acri went Gino. His brothers had married and settled in other parts during the war, his grandmother had died. His uncle, roaring drunk one unforgettable evening had told the German Commandant his personal opinion of Hitler, Mussolini and Germans in general, and had been shot without ceremony, clutching his last bottle of wine.

Given a choice, that is undoubtedly he way he would have wished it to be.

Back to the plough went Gino. His mother and sisters toiled beside him, his father aged before his time by the years of solitary work, could only help in a small way.

Up and down the rows, behind the old mule, went Gino, bitter with resentment, rebelling at the old fashioned methods they had to use. His sharp ears had caught many conversations between the Australians in the camp, had told of farming methods in other lands. Modern machines, which did the work of two men in hours instead of weeks, machines that were as unattainable to Gino Martinelli as the moon and the stars.

Driving the old mule to the village one day with a load of parsnips for the market, Gino was surprised when a very pretty girl smiled shyly at him and said:

"Welcome home, Gino".

Gino looked blankly at her and desperately tried to see some resemblance to somebody he knew.

"You don't remember me", sighed the beauty, "I am Maria Scanzano, your distant cousin". Maria! The plainest most inarticulate child in the little, schoolhouse. This dark eyed, smooth skinned beautiful creature could not be Maria Scanzano!

Intrigued, he stopped and a halting, embarrassed conversation followed. Gino, when he finally drove home, found he had returned just as he had left, with a full load of parsnips, and was soundly berated by his mother for his stupidity.

From this very ordinary meeting there blossomed a love affair that set no throne toppling, started no world conflagration, nor created any international headlines, but to Gino and Maria, it was as wonderful and unique as any that had gone before.

A year later they were wed.

There was feasting and dancing in the village, Maria looked beautiful in her mother's wedding dress, and many eyes were wet with sentimental tears as Gino tenderly lifted his bride into the small mule cart, and drove down the dusty road to the farmhouse, emptied fortunately for a week of his family, who were staying with relatives.

But at the end of the week they returned, and conditions were once again crowded in the household.

His mother, fond though she was of Maria, did not like sharing her kitchen and his sisters, whose incessant quarrelling he had learnt to endure, tried to make Maria take sides, which she endeavoured not to do, thus pleasing neither.

When Maria told him that a baby was on the way Gino knew something must be done. He remembered the Australians, and the wonderful tales they told of the opportunities for a working man in their land, and, saying he was looking for a new mule, he journeyed to Taranto, to make enquiries from the Mayor about migrating to Australia.

The Mayor was not very well informed, but promised to find out particulars, and Gino returned to the farmhouse tell his family the mules were dear.

In their poky little bedroom, he at last told Maria what was on his mind.

"We must go where there is room to move, Maria mia," he said. "This baby will only be the first I hope, and where are we to fit a family in here?"

"Gino, Gino, what you want is what I want", cried Maria.

"But it is so far away, and they do not speak as we do. What will we do, how will we live?" "We must wait until the Mayor sends us word. Surely a young country like that will be only too glad

to have a strong worker like me. And oh Maria, what if it were possible for us to have a farm of our own, with tractors and ploughs and modern machinery, so that we get a good return for our work. I do not mind hard work, but here it is for nothing. If we have to work let it be so that our little one and those who follow him can know a better life than we have known here".

In whispers, for there was so little privacy, they made their plans and waited on the mail.

Finally a large official envelope arrived, full of papers, forms and information from the Australian Migration authorities. There was no chance of further secrecy, for mail at the farmhouse was extremely rare, so Gino told them of his plan. His mother cried out against the idea, but his father, though his voice shook, agreed that Gino and Maria should go.

"We will rent the farmland out to Mario Scarparelli", he said. "Your mother and I can live here on the income, with our vegetables and chickens. Your sisters are both soon to marry, and you must make your own life".

In an amazingly short time they were on a ship bound for they knew not what, hope and excitement varying with trepidation and homesickness.

They landed, with hundreds of others in Sydney, and kind officials helped them in their utter bewilderment. Buses were waiting to take them to a hostel, and that night they lay close together in bed a strange bed, in a strange room in a completely and utterly strange country, Maria filled with tearful doubts, Gino confident.

"You will see, my dear one. One day we will have our own farm. Maybe not this year, or next. But one day. And on that farm will be machines, many machines. I promise you, my wife".

As they were classed as agricultural workers, they were sent to the Griffith district, and, after a short period, Gino obtained employment on one of the big stations. Sheep, wheat, rice and a few cattle were the life-blood of this property, and to Gino's delight, he and Maria were given a small house a short distance from the homestead, and he was initiated into the complexities of operating the tractors.

How he loved to sit on its high seat and see the soil sifted and turned with its big revolving discs. He would work for an hour and then stop, looking back at the tilled soil and imagine doing it by hand, as of yore. Gladness would well up in his throat, and he would raise his face to the bright sun and thank God for being in this place, and vow again that the day would dawn that would see him on his own land, with a tractor just like the beloved one upon which he was sitting, to help him in his work.

Maria's baby was born that spring, and was named Enrico after her father. Luigi, Raphael, Duro, Sophia, Angela and Jane (Gino became more Australian as the years went by) followed. The little house was feeling the strain, and the station owner, Mr. Linton, offered to extend the premises.

But for all the extra mouths that had arrived, the family had continued to save, save, save, towards that dream fulfilment. With the coming of Jane Gino decided that the moment for which he had been waiting had arrived.

Dressed in his best (and only) suit, he visited the bank manager in Griffith who had been custodian of his growing savings.

"The Willow Tree property has not been worked for many years, and I am told the bank has the power to sell it. I have enough money I think for the purchase, I would like to ask for your consideration as a buyer".

The bank manager, who had seldom seen such single-minded dedication in savings, welcomed Gino's suggestion with approval and soon the transfer had been arranged. He offered to lend Gino money for machinery but Gino declined.

"I will not be in debt that I cannot pay. I will continue to work for Mr. Linton, and my sons and I will do what we can at Willow Tree until I have saved up enough for a tractor".

And this he did. They moved into the neglected, but larger homestead and Maria and the girls tended the vegetables, fruit trees and herb garden. A cow supplied their milk, the hens their eggs, fish they caught in the creek, and meat they obtained from Mr. Linton. Slowly the boys and Gino cleared the acres but it was hard work, back once again with hand ploughs and hoes, but the joy of their own land lightened the task.

Finally the total in the bank- rose to a sum that Gino knew was sufficient. He told Mr. Linton he would be finishing in a fortnight's time, and ordered the big red tractor from the agents.

Excitement grew in the household as the day for the tractor arrival drew near. Anxiety took over as rainy day followed rainy day, and the whole area was threatened with flood. Every morning nine pairs of eyes scanned the lowering clouds, every night nine prayers went up to heaven for the rain to cease before the tractor arrived.

On the tenth day they awoke to cloudless skies and a warmer sun. The eleventh day found the countryside everywhere drying out rapidly, roads became passable again, and at five in the evening, a big truck drove up to the house, and the driver, his offsider, Gino, Enrico, Luigi, Raphael and Duro, with verbal advice from Maria, Sophia, Angela and Jane, moved it from the truck to the edge of the home paddock.

Throughout the evening different members of the family would slip outside, to admire, pat, and caress the red beauty until finally night settled down over the countryside, a warm night which seemed to throb with anticipation, anticipation that flowed out from the sleeping Martinellis and surrounded the tractor with an aura you could practically see. The house, the tractor, the family, the property, all waited for the morning which would see the fulfilment of Gino's dream.

And so there he sat, surrounded by his sons, watched from the doorway by his loving wife and daughters, upon his longed-for machine, and the time was upon them.

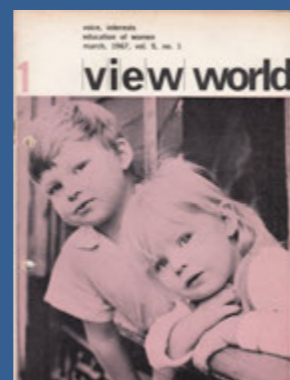
Enrico raised his handkerchief, great-grandfather's watch showed seven exactly and his hand dropped. Gino pressed the starter button and the great engine sprang into life, and the roar filled the air.

The little girls pretended to be frightened and put their hands over their ears. The boys gave a cheer, and Enrico waved his father forward.

Gino took his foot off the brake and pushed the throttle open. The giant took a leap forward, and the soil, weakened by the weeks of rain, subsided suddenly.

The wheels spun madly, the machine reared up, and the most beautiful thing in Gino Martinelli's world toppled slowly sideways, throwing him underneath it.

And killed him.



Logos 1960's-1970's



Logos 1980's





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