That Pretty Girl in the Army

Henry Lawson

Now I often sit at Watty's, when the night is very near,

With a head that's full of jingles—and the fumes of bottled beer;

For I always have a fancy that, if I am over there

When the Army prays for Watty, I'm included in the prayer.

It would take a lot of praying, lots of thumping on the drum,

To prepare our sinful, straying, erring souls for Kingdom Come.

But I love my fellow-sinners! and I hope, upon the whole,

That the Army gets a hearing when it prays for Watty's soul.

-*When the World was Wide*

The Salvation Army does good business in some of the outback towns of the great pastoral wastes of Australia. There's the thoughtless, careless generosity of the bushman, whose pockets don't go far enough down his trousers (that's what's the matter with him), and who contributes to anything that comes along, without troubling to ask questions, like long Bob Brothers of Bourke, who, chancing to be "a Protestant by rights," unwittingly subscribed towards the erection of a new Catholic church, and, being chaffed for his mistake, said:

"Ah, well, I don't suppose it'll matter a hang in the end, anyway it goes. I ain't got nothink agenst the Roming Carflicks."

There's the shearer, fresh with his cheque from a cut-out shed, gloriously drunk and happy, in love with all the world, and ready to subscribe towards any creed and shout for all hands—including Old Nick if he happened to come along. There's the shearer, half-drunk and inclined to be nasty, who has got the wrong end of all things with a tight grip, and who flings a shilling in the face of out-back conventionality (as he thinks) by chucking a bob into the Salvation Army ring. Then he glares round to see if he can catch anybody winking behind his back. There's the cynical joker, a queer mixture, who contributes generously and tempts the reformed boozer

afterwards. There's the severe-faced old station-hand—in clean shirt and neckerchief and white moleskins—in for his annual or semiannual spree, who contributes on principle, and then drinks religiously until his cheque is gone and the horrors are come. There's the shearer, feeling mighty bad after a spree, and in danger of seeing things when he tries to go to sleep. He has dropped ten or twenty pounds over bar counters and at cards, and he now "chucks" a repentant shilling into the ring, with a very private and rather vague sort of feeling that something might come of it. There's the stout, contented, good-natured publican, who tips the Army as if it were a barrel-organ. And there are others and other reasons—black sheep and ne'er-do-weels—and faint echoes of other times in Salvation Army tunes.

Bourke, the metropolis of the Great Scrubs, on the banks of the Darling River, about five hundred miles from Sydney, was suffering from a long drought when I was there in ninety-two; and the heat may or may not have been another cause contributing to the success, from a business point of view, of the Bourke garrison. There was much beer boozing—and, besides, it was vaguely understood (as most things are vaguely understood out there in the drought-haze) that the place the Army came to save us from was hotter than Bourke. We didn't hanker to go to a hotter place than Bourke. But that year there was an extraordinary reason for the Army's great financial success there.

She was a little girl, nineteen or twenty, I should judge, the prettiest girl I ever saw in the Army, and one of the prettiest I've ever seen out of it. She had the features of an angel, but her expression was wonderfully human, sweet and sympathetic. Her big grey eyes were sad with sympathy for sufferers and sinners, and her poke bonnet was full of bunchy, red-gold hair. Her first appearance was somewhat dramatic—perhaps the Army arranged it so.

The Army used to pray, and thump the drum, and sing, and take up collections every evening outside Watty Bothways' Hotel, the Carriers' Arms. They performed longer and more often outside Watty's than any other pub in town—perhaps because Watty was considered the most hopeless publican and his customers the hardest crowd of boozers in Bourke. The band generally began to play about dusk. Watty would lean back comfortably in a basket easy-chair on his wide veranda, and clasp his hands, in a calm, contented way, while the Army banged the drum and got steam up, and whilst, perhaps, there was a barney going on in the bar, or a bloodthirsty fight in the backyard. On such occasions there was something like an indulgent or fatherly expression on his fat and usually emotionless face. And by and by he'd move his head gently and doze. The banging and the singing seemed to soothe him, and the praying, which was often very personal, never seemed to disturb him in the least.

Well, it was about dusk one day; it had been a terrible day, a hundred and something startling in the shade, but there came a breeze after sunset. There had been several dozen of buckets of water thrown on the veranda floor and the ground outside. Watty was seated in his accustomed place when the Army arrived. There was no barney in the bar because there

was a fight in the backyard, and that claimed the attention of all the customers.

The Army prayed for Watty and his clients; then a reformed drunkard started to testify against publicans and all their works. Watty settled himself comfortably, folded his hands, and leaned back and dozed.

The fight was over, and the chaps began to drop round to the bar. The man who was saved waved his arms, and danced round and howled.

“Ye-es!” he shouted hoarsely. “The publicans, and boozers, and gamblers, and sinners may think that Bourke is hot, but hell is a thousand times hotter! I tell you”

“Oh, Lord!” said Mitchell, the shearer, and he threw a penny into the ring.

“Ye-es! I tell you that hell is a million times hotter than Bourke! I tell you”

“Oh, look here,” said a voice from the background, “that won’t wash. Why, don’t you know that when the Bourke people die they send back for their blankets?”

The saved brother glared round.

“I hear a freethinker speaking, my friends,” he said. Then, with sudden inspiration and renewed energy, “I hear the voice of a freethinker. Show me the face of a freethinker,” he yelled, glaring round like a hunted, hungry man. “Show me the face of a freethinker, and I’ll tell you what he is.”

Watty hitched himself into a more comfortable position and clasped his hands on his knee and closed his eyes again.

“Ya-a-a-s!” shrieked the brand. “I tell you, my friends, I can tell a freethinker by his face. Show me the face of a——”

At this point there was an interruption. One-eyed, or Wall-eyed, Bogan, who had a broken nose, and the best side of whose face was reckoned the ugliest and most sinister—One-eyed Bogan thrust his face forward from the ring of darkness into the torchlight of salvation. He had got the worst of a drawn battle; his nose and mouth were bleeding, and his good eye was damaged.

“Look at my face!” he snarled, with dangerous earnestness. “Look at my face! That’s the face of a freethinker, and I don’t care who knows it. Now! what have you got to say against my face, ‘Man-without-a-Shirt?’”

The brother drew back. He had been known in the northwest in his sinful days as "Man-without-a-Shirt," *alias* "Shirty," or "The Dirty Man," and was flabbergasted at being recognized in speech. Also, he had been in a shearing-shed and in a shanty orgie with One-eyed Bogan, and knew the man.

Now most of the chaps respected the Army, and, indeed, anything that looked like religion, but the Bogan's face, as representing free-thought, was a bit too sudden for them. There were sounds on the opposite side of the ring as from men being smitten repeatedly and rapidly below the belt, and long Tom Hall and one or two others got away into the darkness in the background, where Tom rolled helplessly on the grass and sobbed.

It struck me that Bogan's face was more the result of free speech than anything else.

The Army was about to pray when the Pretty Girl stepped forward, her eyes shining with indignation and enthusiasm. She had arrived by the evening train, and had been standing shrinkingly behind an Army lass of fifty Australian summers, who was about six feet high, flat and broad, and had a square face, and a mouth like a joint in boiler plates.

The Pretty Girl stamped her pretty foot on the gravel, and her eyes flashed in the torchlight.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," she said. "Great big men like you to be going on the way you are. If you were ignorant or poor, as I've seen people, there might be some excuse for you. Haven't you got any mothers, or sisters, or wives to think of? What sort of a life is this you lead? Drinking, and gambling, and fighting, and swearing your lives away! Do you ever think of God and the time when you were children? Why don't you make homes? Look at that man's face!" (she pointed suddenly at Bogan, who collapsed and sidled behind his mates out of the light). "Look at that man's face! Is it a face for a Christian? And you help and encourage him to fight. You're worse than he is. Oh, it's brutal. It's—it's wicked. Great big men like you, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

Long Bob Brothers—about six-foot-four—the longest and most innocent there, shrunk down by the wall and got his inquiring face out of the light. The Pretty Girl fluttered on for a few moments longer, greatly excited, and then stepped back, seemingly much upset, and was taken under the wing of the woman with the boiler-plate mouth.

It was a surprise, and very sudden. Bogan slipped round to the backyard, and was seen bathing his battered features at the pump. The rest wore the expression of men who knew that something unusual has happened, but don't know what, and are waiting vacantly for developments.—Except Tom Hall, who had recovered and returned. He stood looking over the head of the ring of bushmen, and apparently taking the same critical interest in the girl as he would in a fight—his expression was such as a journalist might wear who is getting

exciting copy.

The Army had it all their own way for the rest of the evening, and made a good collection. The Pretty Girl stood smiling round with shining eyes as the bobs and tanners dropped in, and then, being shoved forward by the flat woman, she thanked us sweetly, and said we were good fellows, and that she was sorry for some things she'd said to us. Then she retired, fluttering and very much flushed, and hid herself behind the hard woman—who, by the way, had an excrescence on her upper lip which might have stood for a rivet.

Presently the Pretty Girl came from behind the big woman and stood watching things with glistening eyes. Some of the chaps on the opposite side of the ring moved a little to one side and all were careful not to meet her eye—not to be caught looking at her—lest she should be embarrassed. Watty had roused himself a little at the sound of a strange voice in the Army (and such a clear, sweet voice too!) and had a look; then he settled back peacefully again, but it was noticed that he didn't snore that evening.

And when the Army prayed, the Pretty Girl knelt down with the rest on the gravel. One or two tall bushmen bowed their heads as if they had to, and One-eyed Bogan, with the blood washed from his face, stood with his hat off, glaring round to see if he could catch anyone sniggering.

Mitchell, the shearer, said afterwards that the whole business made him feel for the moment like he felt sometimes in the days when he used to feel things.

The town discussed the Pretty Girl in the Army that night and for many days thereafter, but no one could find out who she was or where she belonged to—except that she came from Sydney last. She kept her secret, if she had one, very close—or else the other S.-A. women were not to be pumped. She lived in skillion-rooms at the back of the big weather-board Salvation Army barracks with two other "lassies," who did washing and sewing and nursing, and went shabby, and half starved themselves, and were baked in the heat, like scores of women in the bush, and even as hundreds of women, suffering from religious mania, slave and stint in city slums, and neglect their homes, husbands and children—for the glory of Booth.

The Pretty Girl was referred to as Sister Hannah by the Army people, and came somehow to be known by sinners as "Miss Captain." I don't know whether that was her real name or what rank she held in the Army, if indeed she held any.

She sold *War Crys*, and the circulation doubled in a day. One-eyed Bogan, being bailed up unexpectedly, gave her "half a caser" for a *Cry*, and ran away without the paper or the change. Jack Mitchell bought a *Cry* for the first time in his life, and read it. He said he found some of the articles intensely realistic, and many of the statements were very interesting. He

said he read one or two things in the *Cry* that he didn't know before. Tom Hall, taken unawares, bought three *Crys* from the Pretty Girl, and blushed to find it fame.

Little Billy Woods, the Labourers' Union secretary—who had a poetic temperament and more than the average bushman's reverence for higher things—Little Billy Woods told me in a burst of confidence that he generally had two feelings, one after the other, after encountering that girl. One was that unfathomable far-away feeling of loneliness and longing, that comes at odd times to the best of married men, with the best of wives and children—as Billy had. The other feeling, which came later on, and was a reaction in fact, was the feeling of a man who thinks he's been twisted round a woman's little finger for the benefit of somebody else. Billy said that he couldn't help being reminded by the shy, sweet smile and the shy, sweet "thank you" of the Pretty Girl in the Army, of the shy, sweet smile and the shy, sweet gratitude of a Sydney private barmaid, who had once roped him in, in the days before he was married. Then he'd reckon that the Army lassie had been sent out back to Bourke as a business speculation.

Tom Hall was inclined to reckon so too—but that was after he'd been chaffed for a month about the three *War Crys*.

The Pretty Girl was discussed from psychological points of view; not forgetting the sex problem. Donald Macdonald—shearer, union leader and labour delegate to other colonies on occasion—Donald Macdonald said that whenever he saw a circle of plain or ugly, dried-up women or girls round a shepherd, evangelist or a Salvation Army drum, he'd say "sexually starved!" They were hungry for love. Religious mania was sexual passion dammed out of its course. Therefore he held that morbidly religious girls were the most easily seduced.

But this couldn't apply to Pretty Girl in the Army. Mitchell reckoned that she'd either had a great sorrow—a lot of trouble, or a disappointment in love (the "or" is Mitchell's); but they couldn't see how a girl like her could possibly be disappointed in love—unless the chap died or got into jail for life. Donald decided that her soul had been starved somehow.

Mitchell suggested that it might be only a craving for notoriety, the same thing that makes women and girls go amongst lepers, and out to the battlefield, and nurse ugly pieces of men back to life again; the same thing that makes some women and girls swear ropes round men's necks. The Pretty Girl might be the daughter of well-to-do people—even aristocrats, said Mitchell—she was pretty enough and spoke well enough. "Every woman's a barmaid at heart," as the *Bulletin* puts it, said Mitchell.

But not even one of the haggard women of Bourke ever breathed a suspicion of scandal against her. They said she was too good and too pretty to be where she was. You see it was not as in an old settled town where hags blacken God's world with their tongues. Bourke

was just a little camping town in a big land, where free, good-hearted democratic Australians, and the best of black sheep from the old world were constantly passing through; where husband's were often obliged to be away from home for twelve months, and the storekeepers had to trust the people, and mates trusted each other, and the folks were broad-minded. The mind's eye had a wide range.

After her maiden speech the Pretty Girl seldom spoke, except to return thanks for collections —and she never testified. She had a sweet voice and used to sing.

Now, if I were writing pure fiction, and were not cursed with an obstinate inclination to write the truth, I might say that, after the advent of the Pretty Girl, the morals of Bourke improved suddenly and wonderfully. That One-eyed Bogan left off gambling and drinking and fighting and swearing, and put on a red coat and testified and fought the devil only; that Mitchell dropped his mask of cynicism; that Donald Macdonald ate no longer of the tree of knowledge and ceased to worry himself with psychological problems, and was happy; and that Tom Hall was no longer a scoffer. That no one sneaked round through the scrub after dusk to certain necessary establishments in weather-board cottages on the outskirts of the town; and that the broad-minded and obliging ladies thereof became Salvation Army lassies.

But none of these things happened. Drunks quieted down or got out of the way if they could when the Pretty Girl appeared on the scene, fights and games of "headin' 'em" were adjourned, and weak, ordinary language was used for the time being, and that was about all.

Nevertheless, most of the chaps were in love with that Pretty Girl in the Army—all those who didn't *worship* her privately. Long Bob Brothers hovered round in hopes, they said, that she'd meet with an accident—get run over by a horse or something—and he'd have to carry her in; he scared the women at the barracks by dropping firewood over the fence after dark. Barcoo-Rot, the meanest man in the back country, was seen to drop a threepenny bit into the ring, and a rumour was industriously circulated (by Tom Hall) to the effect that One-eyed Bogan intended to shave and join the Army disguised as a lassie.

Handsome Jake Boreham (*alias* Bore-'em), a sentimental shearer from New Zealand, who had read Bret Harte, made an elaborate attempt for the Pretty Girl, by pretending to be going to the dogs headlong, with an idea of first winning her sorrowful interest and sympathy, and then making an apparently hard struggle to straighten up for her sake. He mated his experience with the cheerful and refreshing absence of reserve which was characteristic of him, and is of most bushmen.

"I'd had a few drinks," he said, "and was having a spell under a gum by the river, when I saw the Pretty Girl and another Army woman coming down along the bank. It was a blazing hot

day. I thought of Sandy and the Schoolmistress in Bret Harte, and I thought it would be a good idea to stretch out in the sun and pretend to be helpless; so I threw my hat on the ground and lay down, with my head in the blazing heat, in the most graceful position I could get at, and I tried to put a look of pained regret on my face, as if I was dreaming of my lost boyhood and me mother. I thought, perhaps, the Girl would pity me, and I felt sure she'd stoop and pick up my hat and put it gently over my poor troubled head. Then I was going to become conscious for a moment, and look hopelessly round, and into her eyes, and then start and look sorrowful and ashamed, and stagger to my feet, taking off my hat like the Silver King does to the audience when he makes his first appearance drunk on the stage; and then I was going to reel off, trying to walk as straight as I could. And next day I was going to clean up my teeth and nails and put on a white shirt, and start to be a new man henceforth.

"Well, as I lay there with my eyes shut, I heard the footsteps come up and stop, and heard 'em whisper, and I thought I heard the Pretty Girl say 'Poor fellow!' or something that sounded like that; and just then I got a God-almighty poke in the ribs with an umbrella—at least I suppose it was aimed for my ribs; but women are bad shots, and the point of the umbrella caught me in the side, just between the bottom rib and the hip-bone, and I sat up with a click, like the blade of a pocketknife.

"The other lassie was the big square-faced woman. The Pretty Girl looked rather more frightened and disgusted than sentimental, but she had plenty of pluck, and soon pulled herself together. She said I ought to be ashamed of myself, a great big man like me, lying there in the dust like a drunken tramp—an eyesore and a disgrace to all the world. She told me to go to my camp, wherever that was, and sleep myself sober. The square-jawed woman said I looked like a fool sitting there. I did feel ashamed, and I reckon I did look like a fool—a man generally does in a fix like that. I felt like one, anyway. I got up and walked away, and it hurt me so much that I went over to West Bourke and went to the dogs properly for a fortnight, and lost twenty quid on a game of draughts against a blindfold player. Now both those women had umbrellas, but I'm not sure to this day which of 'em it was that gave me the poke. It wouldn't have mattered much anyway. I haven't borrowed one of Bret Harte's books since."

Jake reflected a while.

"The worst of it was," he said ruefully, "that I wasn't sure that the girl or the woman didn't see through me, and that worried me a bit. You never can tell how much a woman suspects, and that's the worst of 'em. I found that out after I got married."

The Pretty Girl in the Army grew pale and thin and bigger-eyed. The women said it was a shame, and that she ought to be sent home to her friends, wherever they were. She was laid up for two or three days, and some of the women cooked delicacies and handed 'em over the

barracks fence, and offered to come in and nurse her; but the square woman took washing home and nursed the girl herself.

The Pretty Girl still sold *War Crys* and took up collections, but in a tired, listless, half shamed-faced way. It was plain that she was tired of the Army, and growing ashamed of the Salvationists. Perhaps she had come to see things too plainly.

You see, the Army does no good out back in Australia—except from a business point of view. It is simply there to collect funds for hungry headquarters. The bushmen are much too intelligent for the Army. There was no poverty in Bourke—as it is understood in the city; there was plenty of food; and camping out and roughing it come natural to the bushmen. In cases of sickness, accident, widows or orphans, the chaps sent round the hat, without banging a drum or testifying, and that was all right. If a chap was hard up he borrowed a couple of quid from his mate. If a strange family arrived without a penny, someone had to fix 'em up, and the storekeepers helped them till the man got work. For the rest, we work out our own salvation, or damnation—as the case is—in the bush, with no one to help us, except a mate, perhaps. The Army can't help us, but a fellow-sinner can, sometimes, who has been through it all himself. The Army is only a drag on the progress of Democracy, because it attracts many who would otherwise be aggressive Democrats—and for other reasons.

Besides, if we all reformed the Army would get deuced little from us for its city mission.

The Pretty Girl went to service for a while with the stock inspector's wife, who could get nothing out of her concerning herself or her friends. She still slept at the barracks, stuck to the Army, and attended its meetings.

It was Christmas morning, and there was peace in Bourke and goodwill towards all men. There hadn't been a fight since yesterday evening, and that had only been a friendly one, to settle an argument concerning the past ownership, and, at the same time, to decide as to the future possession of a dog.

It had been a hot, close night, and it ended in a suffocating sunrise. The free portion of the male population were in the habit of taking their blankets and sleeping out in "the Park," or town square, in hot weather; the wives and daughters of the town slept, or tried to sleep, with bedroom windows and doors open, while husbands lay outside on the verandas. I camped in a corner of the park that night, and the sun woke me.

As I sat up I caught sight of a swagman coming along the white, dusty road from the direction of the bridge, where the cleared road ran across west and on, a hundred and thirty miles, through the barren, broiling mulga scrubs, to Hungerford, on the border of Sheol. I knew that swagman's walk. It was John Merrick (Jack Moonlight), one-time Shearers'

Union secretary at Coonamble, and generally "Rep" (shearers' representative) in any shed where he sheared. He was a "better-class shearer," one of those quiet, thoughtful men of whom there are generally two or three in the roughest of rough sheds, who have great influence, and give the shed a good name from a Union point of view. Not quiet with the resentful or snobbish reserve of the educated Englishman, but with a sad or subdued sort of quietness that has force in it—as if they fully realized that their intelligence is much higher than the average, that they have suffered more real trouble and heartbreak than the majority of their mates, and that their mates couldn't possibly understand them if they spoke as they felt and couldn't see things as they do—yet men who understand and are intensely sympathetic in their loneliness and sensitive reserve.

I had worked in a shed with Jack Moonlight, and had met him in Sydney, and to be mates with a bushman for a few weeks is to know him well—anyway, I found it so. He had taken a trip to Sydney the Christmas before last, and when he came back there was something wanting. He became more silent, he drank more, and sometimes alone, and took to smoking heavily. He dropped his mates, took little or no interest in Union matters, and travelled alone, and at night.

The Australian bushman is born with a mate who sticks to him through life—like a mole. They may be hundreds of miles apart sometimes, and separated for years, yet they are mates for life. A bushman may have many mates in his roving, but there is always one *his* mate, "my mate;" and it is common to hear a bushman, who is, in every way, a true mate to the man he happens to be travelling with, speak of *his mate's mate*—"Jack's mate"—who might be in Klondyke or South Africa. A bushman has always a mate to comfort him and argue with him, and work and tramp and drink with him, and lend him quids when he's hard up, and call him a b—— fool, and fight him sometimes; to abuse him to his face and defend his name behind his back; to bear false witness and perjure his soul for his sake; to lie to the girl for him if he's single, and to his wife if he's married; to secure a "pen" for him at a shed where he isn't on the spot, or, if the mate is away in New Zealand or South Africa, to write and tell him if it's any good coming over this way. And each would take the word of the other against all the world, and each believes that the other is the straightest chap that ever lived—"a white man!" And next best to your old mate is the man you're tramping, riding, working, or drinking with.

About the first thing the cook asks you when you come along to a shearers' hut is, "Where's your mate?" I travelled alone for a while one time, and it seemed to me sometimes, by the tone of the inquiry concerning the whereabouts of my mate, that the bush had an idea that I might have done away with him and that the thing ought to be looked into.

When a man drops mateship altogether and takes to "hatting" in the bush, it's a step towards a convenient tree and a couple of saddle-straps buckled together.

I had an idea that I, in a measure, took the place of Jack Moonlight's mate about this time.

" 'Ullo, Jack!" I hailed as he reached the corner of the park.

"Good morning, Harry!" said Jack, as if he'd seen me last yesterday evening instead of three months ago. "How are you getting on?"

We walked together towards the Union Office, where I had a camp in the skillion-room at the back. Jack was silent. But there's no place in the world where a man's silence is respected so much (within reasonable bounds) as in the Australian bush, where every man has a past more or less sad, and every man a ghost—perhaps from other lands that we know nothing of, and speaking in a foreign tongue. They say in the bush, "Oh, Jack's only thinking! " And they let him think. Generally you want to think as much as your mate; and when you've been together some time it's quite natural to travel all day without exchanging a word. In the morning Jim says, "Well, I think I made a bargain with that horse, Bill," and some time late in the afternoon, say twenty miles farther on, it occurs to Bill to "rejoin," "Well, I reckon the blank as sold it to you had yer proper!"

I like a good thinking mate, and I believe that thinking in company is a lot more healthy and more comfortable, as well as less risky, than thinking alone.

On the way to the Union Office Jack and I passed the Royal Hotel, and caught a glimpse, through the open door, of a bed room off the veranda, of the landlord's fresh, fair, young Sydney girl-wife, sleeping prettily behind the mosquito-net, like a sleeping beauty, while the boss lay on a mattress outside on the veranda, across the open door. (He wasn't necessary for publication, but an evidence of good faith.)

I glanced at Jack for a grin, but didn't get one. He wore the pained expression of a man who is suddenly hit hard with the thought of something that might have been.

I boiled the billy and fried a pound of steak.

"Been travelling all night, Jack?" I asked.

"Yes," said Jack. "I camped at Emus yesterday."

He didn't eat. I began to reckon that he was brooding too much for his health. He was much thinner than when I saw him last, and pretty haggard, and he had something of the hopeless, haggard look that I'd seen in Tom Hall's eyes after the last big shearing strike, when Tom had worked day and night to hold his mates up all through the hard, bitter struggle, and the battle was lost.

“Look here, Jack!” I said at last. “What’s up?”

“Nothing’s up, Harry,” said Jack. “What made you think so?”

“Have you got yourself into any fix?” I asked. “What’s the Hungerford track been doing to you?”

“No, Harry,” he said, “I’m all right. How are you?” And he pulled some string and papers and a roll of dusty pound notes from his pocket and threw them on the bunk.

I was hard up just then, so I took a note and the billy to go to the Royal and get some beer. I thought the beer might loosen his mind a bit.

“Better take a couple of quid,” said Jack. “You look as if you want some new shirts and things.” But a pound was enough for me, and I think he had reason to be glad of that later on, as it turned out.

“Anything new in Bourke?” asked Jack as we drank the beer.

“No,” I said, “not a thing—except there’s a pretty girl in the Salvation Army.”

“And it’s about time,” growled Jack.

“Now, look here, Jack,” I said presently, “what’s come over you lately at all? I might be able to help you. It’s not a bit of use telling me that there’s nothing the matter. When a man takes to brooding and travelling alone it’s a bad sign, and it will end in a leaning tree and a bit of clothes-line as likely as not. Tell me what the trouble is. Tell us all about it. There’s a ghost, isn’t there?”

“Well, I suppose so,” said Jack. “We’ve all got our ghosts for that matter. But never you mind, Harry; I’m all right. I don’t go interfering with your ghosts, and I don’t see what call you’ve got to come haunting mine. Why, it’s as bad as kicking a man’s dog.” And he gave the ghost of a grin.

“Tell me, Jack,” I said, “is it a woman?”

“Yes,” said Jack, “it’s a woman. Now, are you satisfied?”

“Is it a girl?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

So there was no more to be said. I'd thought it might have been a lot worse than a girl. I'd thought he might have got married somewhere, sometime, and made a mess of it.

We had dinner at Billy Woods's place, and a sensible Christmas dinner it was—everything cold, except the vegetables, with the hose going on the veranda in spite of the by-laws, and Billy's wife and her sister, fresh and cool-looking and jolly, instead of being hot and brown and cross like most Australian women who roast themselves over a blazing fire in a hot kitchen on a broiling day, all the morning, to cook scalding plum pudding and redhot roasts, for no other reason than that their grandmothers used to cook hot Christmas dinners in England.

And in the afternoon we went for a row on the river, pulling easily up the anabranch and floating down with the stream under the shade of the river timber—instead of going to sleep and waking up helpless and soaked in perspiration, to find the women with headaches, as many do on Christmas Day in Australia.

Mrs Woods tried to draw Jack out, but it was no use, and in the evening he commenced drinking, and that made Billy uneasy. "I'm afraid Jack's on the wrong track," he said.

After tea most of us collected about Watty's veranda. Most things that happened in Bourke happened at Watty's pub, or near it.

If a horse bolted with a buggy or cart, he was generally stopped outside Watty's, which seemed to suggest, as Mitchell said, that most of the heroes drank at Watty's—also that the pluckiest men were found amongst the hardest drinkers. (But sometimes the horse fetched up against Watty's sign and lamppost—which was a stout one of "iron-bark"—and smashed the trap.) Then Watty's was the Carriers' Arms, a union pub; and Australian teamsters are mostly hard cases: while there was something in Watty's beer which made men argue fluently, and the best fights came off in his backyard. Watty's dogs were the most quarrelsome in town, and there was a dog-fight there every other evening, followed as often as not by a man-fight. If a bushman's horse ran away with him the chances were that he'd be thrown on to Watty's veranda, if he wasn't pitched into the bar; and victims of accidents, and sick, hard-up shearers, were generally carried to Watty's pub, as being the most convenient and comfortable for them. Mitchell denied that it was generosity or good nature on Watty's part, he said it was all business—advertisement. Watty knew what he was doing. He was very deep, was Watty. Mitchell further hinted that if *he* was sick he wouldn't be carried to Watty's, for Watty knew what a thirsty business a funeral was. Tom Hall reckoned that Watty bribed the Army on the quiet.

I was sitting on a stool along the veranda wall with Donald Macdonald, Bob Brothers (the Giraffe) and Mitchell, and one or two others, and Jack Moonlight sat on the floor with his back to the wall and his hat well down over his eyes. The Army came along at the usual time,

but we didn't see the Pretty Girl at first—she was a bit late. Mitchell said he liked to be at Watty's when the Army prayed and the Pretty Girl was there; he had no objection to being prayed for by a girl like that, though he reckoned that nothing short of a real angel could save him now. He said his old grandmother used to pray for him every night of her life and three times on Sunday, with Christmas Day extra when Christmas Day didn't fall on a Sunday; but Mitchell reckoned that the old lady couldn't have had much influence because he became more sinful every year, and went deeper in ways of darkness, until finally he embarked on a career of crime.

The Army prayed, and then a thin "ratty" little woman bobbed up in the ring; she'd gone mad on religion as women do on woman's rights and hundreds of other things. She was so skinny in the face, her jaws so prominent, and her mouth so wide, that when she opened it to speak it was like a ventriloquist's dummy and you could almost see the cracks open down under her ears.

"They say I'm cracked!" she screamed in a shrill, cracked voice. "But I'm not cracked—I'm only cracked on the Lord Jesus Christ! That's all I'm cracked on ." And just then the Amen man of the Army—the Army groaner we called him, who was always putting both feet in it—just then he blundered forward, rolled up his eyes, threw his hands up and down as if he were bouncing two balls, and said, with deep feeling:

"Thank the Lord she's got a crack in the right place!"

Tom Hall doubled up, and most of the other sinners seemed to think there was something very funny about it. And the Army, too, seemed struck with an idea that there was something wrong somewhere, for they started a hymn.

A big American negro, who'd been a night watchman in Sydney, stepped into the ring and waved his arms and kept time, and as he got excited he moved his hands up and down rapidly, as if he was hauling down a rope in a great hurry through a pulley block above, and he kept saying, "Come down, Lord!" all through the hymn, like a bass accompaniment, "Come down, Lord; come down, Lord; come down, Lord; come down, Lord!" and the quicker he said it the faster he hauled. He was as good as a drum. And, when the hymn was over, he started to testify.

"My frens!" he said, "I was once black as der coals in der mined! I was once black as der ink in der ocean of sin! But now—thank an' bless the Lord!—I am whiter dan der dribben snow!"

Tom Hall sat down on the edge of the veranda and leaned his head against a post and cried. He had contributed a bob this evening, and he was getting his money's worth.

Then the Pretty Girl arrived and was pushed forward into the ring. She looked thinner and whiter than I'd ever seen her, and there was a feverish brightness in her eyes that I didn't like.

"Men!" she said, "this is Christmas Day I didn't hear any more for, at the sound of her voice, Jack Moonlight jumped up as if he'd sat on a baby. He started forward, stared at her for a moment as if he couldn't believe his eyes, and then said, "Hannah!" short and sharp. She started as if she was shot, gave him a wild look, and stumbled forward; the next moment he had her in his arms and was steering for the private parlour.

I heard Mrs Bothways calling for water and smelling-salts; she was as fat as Watty, and very much like him in the face, but she was emotional and sympathetic. Then presently I heard, through the open window, the Pretty Girl say to Jack, "Oh, Jack, Jack! Why did you go away and leave me like that? It was cruel!"

"But you told me to go, Hannah," said Jack.

"That—that didn't make any difference. Why didn't you write?" she sobbed.

"Because you never wrote to me, Hannah," he said.

"That—that was no excuse!" she said. "It was so k-k-k-cruel of you, Jack."

Mrs Bothways pulled down the window. A new-comer asked Watty what the trouble was, and he said that the Army girl had only found her chap, or husband, or long-lost brother or something, but the missus was looking after the business; then he dozed again.

And then we adjourned to the Royal and took the Army with us.

"That's the way of it," said Donald Macdonald. "With a woman it's love or religion; with a man it's love or the devil."

"Or with a man," said Mitchell, presently, "it's love and the devil both, sometimes, Donald."

I looked at Mitchell hard, but for all his face expressed he might only have said, "I think it's going to rain."

elsewhere.