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## THE ROAD, THE PINE AND THE GLADE

A SHORT STORY

Written for "The Listener"  
by BARBARA DENT



THEY were digging out the rabbit burrow, the two of them—and the dog. It was on the hillside, and it was late afternoon with the sun slipping down and the shadows creeping up over the grass, like the tide creeping in up the sands. Soon there would be a soft, bluey autumn haze over the swamp where the lazy smoke from the peat fires met the cool evening air and flattened out peacefully in swathes. The Kupete hills were blue and soft, and Chummie's yaps rose clear and shrill, like sharp splinters, undisturbed, into the stillness.

Chummie paused and looked up, tail and stern wagging, pink tongue lolling, ears cocked, earth daubed on his muzzle and on his black whiskers where he had been tearing at the burrow with his teeth.

"Scitchem, Chummie!" said Ray. "Good dog, good boy."

The last excited yap and scurry of claws brought him to the end of the burrow. A sniff, and he was pulled away quickly before he had a real chance to see if that soft place of grey fur and straw really hid a rabbit.

Arthur lay on his stomach by the burrow and explored with his hand.

"There's nothing there," he said, pulling out a handful of the furry bed. "There, Chummie," he said, and leapt on the eager spaniel, pushing his muzzle into the fur. The dog sniffed and blew and sat down bright-eyed to watch.

"I'm glad there aren't any," said Ray. "I used to think it was fun when Chummie dug them out, but now I think it's cruel. Even if he doesn't get them, I don't suppose the mother'd ever come back to the babies after we'd handled them."

"No, I don't suppose she would," said Arthur. "They don't generally after they smell humans. Birds don't either."

He patted Chummie. "You were a good dog anyway." He picked up his .22. "Shall we go on round the gully and see if there are any more out before we go back? It's just about the right time now."

"Do you want to much?" asked Ray.

"No," he said. He looked at her. "I don't want to much. I only thought perhaps you wanted to."

"No, I don't like shooting much now either. They cry sometimes. When they cry it's like a baby screaming. It's awful—I don't like it. And if they only

get wounded and you can't find them, they might be in pain for hours. I can't bear to think of that. I don't know how I ever enjoyed it so much."

"No, it is pretty rotten," said Arthur. "It's not too good when they scream. I don't like it then either, but girls always notice that sort of thing more than boys, don't they?"

"Arthur, how old are you?"

"I'll be 17 in May."

"I'm 16 in April. I'm only a year behind you. You're small though, aren't you?"

"I can't help it. I didn't ask to be, you know. I—"

"Oh Arthur, I didn't mean to hurt you. I just meant—well, you are small—but I like you small. And I like your hands."

Arthur looked at her, shining cheeked where the sun had caught her, gleaming haired. He caught his breath.

"I like you too," he said. "Gee, you've got corker eyes. I like your eyes—and your hair's so soft and shiny and black."

There was a small, breathless silence. She could feel her heart jerking in her throat. Arthur's eyes were looking into hers. He's going to kiss me, she thought. She was afraid, although she didn't know why.

"Let's go," she said. "We'll go up the Road, and see if there are any blackberries left, and then round the hay paddock home."

CHUMMIE had gone. They could hear his yaps from the swamp, and see him now and then leaping logs and holes as he chased out rabbits and pursued them. The hills were still dry and yellow. There had not been any proper rains yet to bring on the autumn growth. Thistledown clung to the grass stalks. A quail called monotonously, koo-aw-aw, koo-aw-aw, from the manuka. There was a shadow now on this side of the gully. They followed round the track the cows had made and up the other side. They were silent till they reached the fence.

The Road was a fenced-off strip of land which had never been made into a proper road. There was a rutty track along it. Manuka, bracken and blackberries bordered it, a plantation of wattles and pines backed it, and there was a batch of hives in among the pines. They didn't seem to belong to anyone. There was no farmhouse near, and Ray had never seen anyone tending them or

(continued on next page)

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