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some of the men went down to the station with the last lorry and stayed down there. If they couldn't get the driver to stay they walked back drunk or fell asleep on the way. Sailor knew every puddle and stone on the road to the pub. "Like Mark Twain on the Mississippi," he'd say, "I know every shoal blindfold. Whoah there! Three points to starboard or you'll be up to your bloody neck," he'd yell. And by God you would be. The liquor oiled Sailor's tongue, and somehow made him grow. Ben liked getting drunk with Sailor, but Ben's wife didn't like him splashing the money. You've got to get out of here," she'd say. "This is no place to bring up kids. We've got to save and move out, into town maybe."

To-day she hung over the tub washing his sweaty shirt and singlet and socks. The copper was well stoked up. There was no shortage of water either. All through the winter the tanks overflowed, corrugating the gardens and paths and carrying the soil into the creek. But in spite of the wet the slabs smouldered night and day on the tip at the side of the mill. She could see the smoke now as she leant out of the window, shooting the neighbour's cat from the fowl-run. Outer shavings, no good for timber, they were good firewood in any language but not worth transportation. The cabbages sprouting in the small dark plot grew on wood ash and humus. So did the nasturtium in the bed under the wash-house window, that startled her with its fierce growth, mothering the wall and producing leaves like saucers. It was a world of growth and decay. But chained to the tubs and the range, and insulated from a childhood home and friends in town by miles of mud and slush, Ben's wife brooded like the bush, only more fiercely, hating the small box-like house and the sooty smell of kerosene lamps, and the torn clothes and dirty feet of her children smearing the grime of the yard on the one good carpet, the two good chairs; resenting the coarse thick socks, the greasy singlets; hating the low cloud that cut off the horizon levelling even the hills. To-day she hung over the tub, knowing the scene too well, reliving the day that was to-day, yesterday and forever, unless something happened; unless. . . .

With a start she saw the procession coming from the mill: men moving slowly, men carrying something. . . . Men walking slowly carrying someone. . . . Suddenly she ran, her heart beating wildly, clasping her hand to her side in an agony of fear. "Ben, Ben, Ben!" she cried. A wild hysteria shook her so that she did not see; so that she was unaware of other women running. . . . Until at last she was there, and Ben was holding her hand and saying, "All right, old dear. It's only Johnnie, and it's nothing serious."

JOHNNIE lived by himself in one of the shacks at the back of the mill. He had his meals with Sailor's wife, who ran the boarding house. It wasn't a boarding house really. She had her own kids to look after and the house was full as far as beds went; but all the men who weren't married had their meals there. She got twenty-five bob a week from them, and the house rent-free to run things that way. There wasn't much in it. Besides Sailor and herself and three kids she had six men to wash and cook and cut sandwiches for; and

once every week she went down to the pub and got shikkered. She was up at 5 o'clock most mornings, and when she went down to the pub on a weeknight she didn't go to bed at all, but just started in on the sandwiches; seven big lunches for the men, and three smaller ones for the kids who went in to school with the second lorry load.

When she found that it was Johnnie that was hurt she took over the way she always did. While they were waiting for the lorry to come back she took care of the foot. "How did you do it, kid? Meat shortage isn't as bad as all that," she said. She worked over him steadily and easily like she did over the sandwiches, and then she lit a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth. "Feeling better?"

And Johnnie, who had come to hearing Ben's wife yell out, thought, "Now everything is a big fuss, but it's only a little thing really. A man can live without toes." And suddenly he realised that he had passed out and he coloured, wondering what they'd think. Well, Christ almighty, accidents were always happening and it was always the same, except that he had never passed out before.

ANDY was a great fellow with his men. Andy was in the bush for the wood he could get out of it, but he was a fair boss. When there was anything on they were never stuck for the lorry. And when there was anyone hurt there wasn't a quicker man to get things moving. In his younger days Andy had been a crack bushman himself. He had come away from the chops with good money in his belt, but he had stuck to it. And when the chance came he went in for his own mill. No man ever made anything on wages, so Andy paid wages and collected on footage. The little mill was Andy's creation: with no Andy there would have been no houses. There would have been no street with five boxes with squares cut out of them for windows on either side, no cabbage or nasturtium in the cleared beds, no chickens behind the wires, no clothes props or tin chimneys with the smoke always coming, no slab heap smouldering against the rain, no mill stuck in the heart of the bush with the inscription carved, "World's End." Also there would have been no community of thirty souls poked away in the back of beyond, though God knows where they would have been had they not been there. Sailor on the high seas perhaps, and the others in other nooks and crannies where the world's work is done. . . . For without the mill settlement there would have been so many feet of timber less, so many fewer cheese crates, so many less houses in the suburb. . . . So when a man got hurt Andy saw to it that he went to hospital in his car or in the big truck that took the heart out of the bush and took the sweat out of the man and lined Andy's pockets and built a fine bank balance, though Christ knows he deserved it.

To Johnnie, sitting up gripping his leg to stop it from flopping when the bumps came, no three miles were ever longer. He could feel the blood drain from his face and the blue vein thump high up. He wanted to talk, but said nothing. Ralph, driving, leaned forward and thought, Thank God I'm out of it. Shoving his foot down, feeling the power, he said: "I got mine sniggling."

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